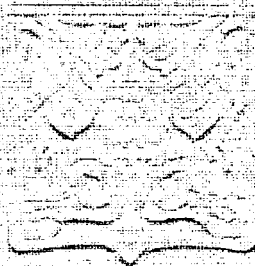
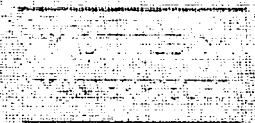


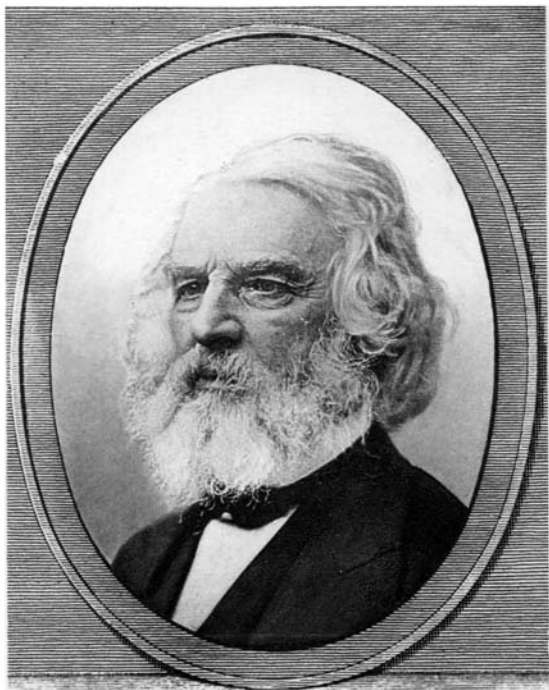
LITTLE
MASTER
PIECES

AUTOBIOG-
RAPHY

34



**Library of
Little Masterpieces**



Henry W. Longfellow.

Library of
Little Masterpieces
In Forty-four Volumes

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Edited by
GEORGE ILES



VOLUME XXXIV

PUBLISHED BY
DOUBLEDAY, PAGE & COMPANY
FOR
THE REVIEW OF REVIEWS COMPANY
1909

Copyright, 1884, 1887, by Houghton, Mifflin & Company

Copyright, 1900, by Henry George

Copyright, 1908, by Doubleday, Page & Company

PREFACE

FIRST in this band of writers is Longfellow, whose tenderness of spirit makes him the best beloved of American singers. Other poets, as Emerson, have on occasion taken a higher flight, only to be borne all the farther from homely joys and griefs. At the opposite pole from Longfellow is Poe, who seems always to write in the shadow, and this by sheer artistic preference for the effects of gloom. His verse is melancholy to the verge of morbidness; yet in "Annabel Lee," we have a love lyric more haunting than ever rang out from the harp of Scott or Moore. A distinct echo of Poe catches the ear in the stanzas of Tennyson, who offers us his one account of how he cast the facts of observation into the crucible of fancy.

A poet of quite other mould is Burns, who gave the English-speaking world its best songs, eloquent with virile passion and manly love of freedom. Burns did not fully unveil himself in his verse: the vigour, and depth of his intellect come out in his letters, chiefly those to Mrs. Dunlop. To peruse them is bitterly to regret that a mind so clear failed, after all, to grasp the helm of destiny, so that the career of Burns ended early and in darkness. Scott, next in this roll of honour, began as a poet, and then resigned verse for prose to become the chief creator of

Preface

historical romances. He gives us glimpses of himself as a companion, an observer, and an author.

Returning to America we pass to Hawthorne, who undoubtedly was in essence a poet. His weird imagination, his skill in sounding the depths and shoals of human nature, mark him chief among American writers of fiction. There was little in common between this moody recluse of Salem and Charles Dickens, a comedian who took to the desk instead of the stage, and gave us melodrama, or rollicking farce, with here and there a scene of tragedy and pathos. The irrespressible vitality of the man comes out in his correspondence, and so does a cool, judicial quality, that might not be expected in the creator of Sam Weller and Sairey Gamp. Another vivid contrast appears as Dickens gives place to Charlotte Brontë, the shrinking little governess of the Yorkshire moors, whose letters show how much of her life went into her books. Next follows George Eliot, who was a great novelist because she was first of all a great woman, as richly endowed in heart as in mind. Her letters plainly declare how her incomparable sympathy reached the innermost springs of the men and women, who duly transfigured, became Adam Bede and Hetty Sorrel, Mr. Bulstrode and Dorothea Brooke. Next that great romancer, Robert Louis Stevenson, tells us what books influenced him most, and how he came seriously to devote himself to literature,

Preface

despite the engineering traditions of his family. He adds a word of interesting comment on American writers. In parting we shake the hand of Henry George, who enlisted remarkable gifts of exposition in the field of economics. His story of struggle and success, of love, of religious trust, are of the transparent sincerity that marked every page he wrote.

CONTENTS

WRITERS

	PAGE
HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW	3
Early impressions. Aspires after eminence in literature. "Wreck of the <i>Hesperus</i> ," "The Belfry of Bruges." "Evangeline." To a sympathetic reviewer. Toil of teaching at Harvard. Death of his mother. "The cross of snow." On the death of a little child. On translating. Bores. "The Divine Tragedy." Could not poetise at will. At seventy. Co-education. Table Talk. The shaping of "Excelsior."	
EDGAR ALLAN POE	28
Youthful ambitions. What poetry is. On his Tales. Literature as a profession. Poetry a passion, not a study. Writing evokes thought. How he revised "The Raven."	
ALFRED TENNYSON	38
Suggestions for "The Princess."	
ROBERT BURNS	43
Autobiographical sketch, sent to Dr. Moore. Boyhood. Early reading. Begins rhyming. A diligent reader. Poverty at home. New experiences. Begins his songs. Farming and poetry. Publishes his poems. A poet to excel must labor. In sorrow. Sources of inspiration.	
WALTER SCOTT	65
His debt to literary societies. A backward glance at his youth. Learned something from everybody. Enjoyment of solitude. Fidelity as an observer. Wrote best early in the day. Moods in composition.	

Contents

	PAGE
NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE . . .	74

As a boy. A literary recluse. "Twice-told Tales."

His early reading. Concerning college and a career. Not at one with New England practicalities. A retrospect at thirty-three: a letter to Longfellow. At Brook Farm: a ploughman. Sympathy beneath his reserve. A gift considered as a loan. "The Scarlet Letter": its strict unity of theme. "The House of the Seven Gables": its composition. Life in England: an invitation to Longfellow. At fifty: a backward look. Hawthorne as a lover; a letter to Miss Peabody. Another letter to her. A letter to his wife.

CHARLES DICKENS	99
---------------------------	----

Hardships as a boy. A little gentleman. A friend in need. Deliverance at last. His methods in authorship defended. Penalties as an author. Sketches his career for Wilkie Collins. Criticism as editor. Beggars all! Toil as an author. A fatherly word on taking pains. Advice to a son leaving home.

CHARLOTTE BRONTË	121
----------------------------	-----

Loneliness in Brussels. Self-sacrifice. Authorship requires imagination. A book may in part write itself. Originals of her characters. Where friendship may disappoint. Novelty *versus* originality. An unhesitating worker.

GEORGE ELIOT	133
------------------------	-----

No self-denial in genuine virtue. Happiness as an art. Love for Sara Hennell. A friendly expostulation. Begins to write fiction. Her fidelity in creation. Readers often guess wrongly. Reception of "Adam Bede." Anxiety for truth in her art. Doing without opium. Higher education for women.

Contents

	PAGE
ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON	148

"Books which have influenced me." Sketches his career to 1887. A word on American writers.

HENRY GEORGE	162
------------------------	-----

Goes to sea as a boy. Shipwreck threatens. Tries mining. A printer once more. Begins writing. Writes "Progress and Poverty." A prophecy regarding "Progress and Poverty." A response to criticism. Religion. The husband-lover.

WRITERS

HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW

[Professor George E. Woodberry, an eminent poet and critic, in his "America in Literature," published by Harper & Brothers, New York, 1905, says this of Longfellow:

"His trust, his humility, his hospitality to the joys and sorrows of domestic life, his tenderness, his consolation, his noble nature, his just taste in what to say and what to leave unsaid about the crises of lives not tragic, but touched with human things that have been and may be again,' his companionableness for souls not over-strenuous, but full of all the pieties of life endearing life — these things give him long lease of fame. Within his unemphatic range he has an unsuspected variety, and thereby expresses without weariness, except to the life-jaded, an American nature of such sweetness, refinement, and purity, that it has become almost exemplary of an ideal of the literary life on this soil.

"Hiawatha, Evangeline, and Miles Standish, each remains the only successful poem of its kind — one of Indian life, one of the Colonial pastoral, one of the Puritan idyl — while the trials made by others have been numerous. In each of these, and especially in the first and second, there is in quality a marvellous purity of tone which, for those who are sensitive to it, is one of the rarest of poetic pleasures. . . ."

Referring to his shorter poems:

"If Heaven ever grants the prayer that a poet may write the songs of a people, it is surely in such poems as these that the divine gift reveals its presence. They are in the mouths of children and on the lips of boys, and it is well; but they are also strength and consolation to older hearts. They are read in quiet hours, they are murmured in darkened rooms, they blend with the sacred experiences of many lives. The Psalm of Life is a trumpet-call. A music breathes from Resignation in which the clod on the

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

coffin-lid ceases to be heard and dies out of the ear at last with peace.”]

EARLY IMPRESSIONS

“OUT of my childhood,” wrote Mr. Longfellow, in later years, “rises in my memory the recollection of many things rather as poetic impressions than as prosaic facts. Such are the damp mornings of early spring, with the loud crowing of cocks and the cooing of pigeons on roofs of barns. Very distinct in connection with these are the indefinite longings incident to childhood; feelings of wonder and loneliness which I could not interpret and scarcely take cognisance of. But they have remained in my mind.”

ASPIRES AFTER EMINENCE IN LITERATURE

[TO HIS FATHER]

December 5, 1824.

[In his eighteenth year]

I take this early opportunity to write to you, because I wish to know fully your inclination with regard to the profession I am to pursue when I leave college.

For my part, I have already hinted to you what would best please me. I want to spend one year at Cambridge for the purpose of reading history, and of becoming familiar with the best authors in polite literature; whilst at the same time I can be acquiring a knowledge of the Italian language, without an acquaintance with

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

which I shall be shut out from one of the most beautiful departments of letters. The French I mean to understand pretty thoroughly before I leave college. After leaving Cambridge I would attach myself to some literary periodical publication, by which I could maintain myself and still enjoy the advantages of reading. Now, I do not think that there is anything visionary or chimerical in my plan thus far. The fact is — and I will not disguise it in the least, for I ought not — I most eagerly aspire after future eminence in literature; my whole soul burns most ardently for it, and every earthly thought centres in it. There may be something visionary in *this*, but I flatter myself that I have prudence enough to keep my enthusiasm from defeating its own object by too great haste. Surely, there never was a better opportunity offered for the exertion of literary talent in our own country than is now offered. To be sure, most of our literary men thus far have not been professedly so, until they have studied and entered the practice of Theology, Law, or Medicine. But this is evidently lost time. I do believe that we ought to pay more attention to the opinion of philosophers, that “nothing but Nature can qualify a man for knowledge.”

Whether Nature has given me any capacity for knowledge or not, she has at any rate given me a very strong predilection for literary pursuits, and I am almost confident in believing, that, if I can ever rise in the world, it must be

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

by the exercise of my talent in the wide field of literature. With such a belief, I must say that I am unwilling to engage in the study of the law.

Here, then, seems to be the starting point: and I think it best to float out into the world upon that tide and in that channel which will the soonest bring me to my destined port, and not to struggle against both wind and tide and by attempting what is impossible lose everything.

"WRECK OF THE HESPERUS"

(DIARY)

December 30, 1839. — I wrote last night a notice of Allston's poems. After which I sat till twelve o'clock by my fire, smoking, when suddenly it came into my mind to write the Ballad of the Schooner *Hesperus*; which I accordingly did. Then I went to bed, but could not sleep. New thoughts were running in my mind, and I got up to add them to the ballad. It was three by the clock. I then went to bed and fell asleep. I feel pleased with the ballad. It hardly cost me an effort. It did not come into my mind by lines but by stanzas.

"THE BELFRY OF BRUGES"

(DIARY)

May 30, 1824. — In the evening took the railway from Ghent to Bruges. Stopped at

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

"La Fleur de Blé," attracted by the name, and found it a good hotel. It was not yet night; and I strolled through the fine old streets and felt myself a hundred years old. The chimes seemed to be ringing incessantly; and the air of repose and antiquity was delightful. . . . Oh those chimes, those chimes, how deliciously they lull one to sleep! The little bells, with their clear liquid notes, like the voices of boys in a choir, and the solemn bass of the great bell tolling in, like the voice of a friar!

31st.—Rose before five and climbed the high belfry which was once crowned by the gilded copper dragon now at Ghent. The carillon of forty-eight bells; the little chamber in the tower; the machinery like a huge barrel organ, with keys like a musical instrument for the *carillonneur* (ringer); the view from the tower; the singing of swallows with the chimes; the fresh morning air; the mist in the horizon; the red roofs far below; the canal, like a silver clasp, linking the city with the sea — how much to remember!

"EVANGELINE"

(DIARY)

December 15, 1846. — Stayed at home, working a little at Evangeline; planning out the second part, which fascinates me, — if I can but give complete tone and expression to it. Of materials for this part there is superabundance. The difficulty is to select, and to give unity to variety.

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

17th.—Finished this morning, and copied, the first canto of the second part of *Evangeline*. The portions of the poem which I write in the morning, I write chiefly standing at my desk here by the window, so as to need no copying. What I write at other times is scrawled with a pencil on my knee in the dark, and has to be written out afterward. This way of writing with a pencil and portfolio I enjoy much, as I can sit by the fireside and do not use my eyes. I see a panorama of the Mississippi advertised. This comes very apropos. The river comes to me instead of my going to the river; and as it is to flow through the pages of the poem, I look upon this as a special benediction.

TO A SYMPATHETIC REVIEWER

[TO JOHN S. DWIGHT]

December 10, 1847.

I should have written sooner to thank you for your most friendly and cordial notice of *Evangeline* in the *Harbinger*, but by some adverse fate I could not get a copy of the paper until some ten or fifteen days after its publication. It would hardly be modest in me to tell you how much satisfaction it gave me. But, setting modesty aside, I thank you for it very heartily, and this rather for the sympathy than the praise. There are so many persons who rush forward in front of one, and seizing one's Pegasus

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

by the rein give him such a jerk as to make his mouth bleed, that I always feel grateful to any one who is willing to go a few paces side by side with me. I think you will agree with me that what a writer asks of his reader is not so much to *like* as to *listen*. You I have to thank for both.

THE TOIL OF TEACHING AT HARVARD

(DIARY)

April 3, 1848. — It seems like folly to record the college days — the working in the crypts of life, the underground labour. Pardon me, O ye souls who seeing education only from afar speak of it in such glowing words! You see only the great pictures hanging in the light; not the grinding of the paint and oil, nor the pulling of hair from the camel's back for the brushes.

DEATH OF HIS MOTHER

(DIARY)

March 12, 1851. — As I was going to college this afternoon, I met a boy bringing a telegraphic despatch from Portland. My heart failed me at the sight and foretold its contents. They were, "Your mother died to-day suddenly." In a few minutes I was on my way to Portland, where I arrived before midnight. In the chamber where I last took leave of her lay my mother, to welcome and take leave of me no more. I sat all that night alone with her —

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

without terror, almost without sorrow, so tranquil had been her death. A sense of peace came over me, as if there had been no shock or jar in nature, but a harmonious close to a long life.

THE CROSS OF SNOW

In 1861 the poet's wife died as the result of a most tragical fire. In the poet's Life by Mr. Samuel Longfellow, his brother, we are told:

"Eighteen years afterward, looking over, one day, an illustrated book of Western scenery, his attention was arrested by a picture of that mysterious mountain (in Colorado) upon whose lonely, lofty breast the snow lies in long furrows that make a rude but wonderfully clear image of a vast cross. At night, as he looked upon the pictured countenance of his wife that hung upon his chamber wall, his thoughts framed themselves into the verses that follow. He put them away in his portfolio, where they were found after his death. That has removed from them the seal of secrecy."

In the long sleepless watches of the night,
A gentle face — the face of one long dead —
Looks at me from the wall, where round its
head
The night lamp casts a halo of pale light.

Here in this room she died; and soul more white
Never through martyrdom of fire was led
To its repose; nor can in books be read
The legend of a life more benedight.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

There is a mountain in the distant West
That, sun-defying, in its deep ravines
Displays a cross of snow upon its side,
Such is the cross I wear upon my breast

These eighteen years, through all the changing
scenes
And seasons, changeless since the day she died.
July 10, 1879.

ON THE DEATH OF A LITTLE CHILD

[TO —]

April 23, 1862.

Your letter and your poems have touched
me very much. Tears fell down my cheeks as
I read them, and I think them very true and
tender expressions of your sense of loss.

So the little ones fade and fall, like blossoms
wafted away by the wind! But the wind is the
breath of God, and the falling blossoms perfume
the air, and the remembrance of them is sweet
and sacred.

In our greatest sorrows we must not forget
that there is always some one who has a greater
sorrow, or at all events a more recent one; and
that may give us courage, though it cannot give
us comfort.

ON TRANSLATING

[TO JOHN NEAL]

August 2, 1867.

I had the pleasure of receiving your letter
yesterday, and am very happy to get your

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

heartly approval of my attempt to tell the exact truth of Dante. A great many people think that a translation ought not to be too faithful; that the writer should put *himself* into it as well as his original; that it should be Homer and Co., or Dante and Co.; and that what the foreign author really says should be falsified or modified, if thereby the smoothness of the verse can be improved. On the contrary I maintain — and am delighted that you agree with me — that a translator, like a witness on the stand, should hold up his right hand and swear to “tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.” You, who all your life long have been fighting for the truth in all things, without fear or favour, could not, I am sure, think otherwise.

BORES

TO G. W. GREENE

September, 16, 1870.

We returned yesterday from Nahant all in good condition, sailing up the harbour in a yacht in the lovely September day. Entering the old house again was like coming back from Europe. I had a kind of dazed feeling, a kind of familiar unfamiliar sense of place. But in the evening one of my most intimate bores came in, saying, “I did not know that you had got back, but thought I would come up and see.” So he came up and saw, and — I knew that I was in Cambridge.

This fact was still further confirmed to-day; for immediately after breakfast came one of my crazy women, and I had no sooner disposed of her than there appeared another bore, who occasionally frequents these forests — huge, Hyrcanian, hopeless! There can be no doubt of the fact, I am certainly in Cambridge.

While I was writing the last line an Irishwoman called with a petition to the Governor to pardon her son, in prison for theft, "that he may become what he is capable of being, — an honour to his family and the community."

"THE DIVINE TRAGEDY"

(FROM A JOURNAL)

January 6, 1871.—The subject of the Divine Tragedy has taken entire possession of me, so that I can think of nothing else. All day pondering upon and arranging it.

7th.—I find all hospitalities and social gatherings just now great interruptions. But perhaps it is for the best [that I have them]. I should work too hard, and perhaps not so well.

8th. During the last week I have written five scenes [in the Tragedy].

COULD NOT POETIZE AT WILL

TO FLORENCE A —

November 20, 1871.

I have put off answering your nice little note from day to day; but, as you see, I have not

forgotten it. I have been hoping all along that some lines of poetry, such as you ask for, would come into my mind. But they would not, and so I have to write you in prose, not to keep you waiting any longer.

If you will ask your papa, who knows all about it, he will tell you that good poems do not always come to one's mind when wanted. Verses — yes, one can write those at any time; but real poetry — that is another matter. I think good prose is better than bad verse. I do not say bad *poetry*, because when it is bad, it is no longer poetry.

And so I send you this little note instead of a little song; and with it good wishes for your birthday, and kind remembrances for your father.

AT SEVENTY

TO G. W. CHILDS

March 13, 1877.

You do not know yet what it is to be seventy years old. I will tell you, so that you may not be taken by surprise when your turn comes. It is like climbing the Alps. You reach a snow-crowned summit, and see behind you the deep valley stretching miles and miles away, and before you other summits higher and whiter, which you may have strength to climb, or may not. Then you sit down and meditate and wonder which it will be. That is the whole story,

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

amplify it as you may. All that one can say is that life is opportunity.

CO-EDUCATION

TO MISS ELIZABETH STUART PHELPS

August 21, 1878.

I thank you for the paragraph on Co-education. That is a difficult problem to solve. I know that life, like French poetry, is imperfect without the feminine rhyme. But I remember how much time I lost at the Academy, in my boyhood, looking across the schoolroom at the beautiful rhyme. Perhaps, after all, it was not lost time, but a part of my education. Of what woman was it said that "to know her was a liberal education," and who said it? * Certainly there is something more in education than is set down in the school-books. Whittier has touched the point very poetically in that little lyric of his called "In School Days."

FROM HIS TABLE TALK

If we could read the secret history of our enemies, we should find in each man's life sorrow and suffering enough to disarm all hostility.

As turning the logs will make a dull fire burn, so change of studies a dull brain.

* It was Steele who said of Lady Elizabeth Hastings, under the name of Aspasia, that to "love her was a liberal education." *The Tatler*, No. 49.

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

The laws of nature are just, but terrible. There is no weak mercy in them. Cause and consequence are inseparable and inevitable. The elements have no forbearance. The fire burns, the water drowns, the air consumes, the earth buries. And perhaps it would be well for our race if the punishment of crimes against the laws of man were as inevitable as the punishment of crimes against the laws of nature — were man as unerring in his judgments as nature.

In the mouths of many men soft words are like roses that soldiers put into the muzzle of their muskets on holidays.

We often excuse our own want of philanthropy by giving the name of fanaticism to the more ardent zeal of others.

Every great poem is in itself limited by necessity — but in its suggestions unlimited and infinite.

When we reflect that all the aspects of nature, all the emotions of the soul, and all the events of life have been the subjects of poetry for hundreds and thousands of years, we can hardly wonder that there should be so many resemblances and coincidences of expression among poets, but rather that they are not more numerous and striking.

The first pressure of a sorrow crushes out from our hearts the best wine; afterward the

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

constant weight of it brings forth bitterness — the taste and stain from the lees of the vat.

Perseverance is a great element of success. If you only knock long enough and loud enough at the gate, you are sure to wake up somebody.

There are but few thinkers in the world, but a great many people who think they think.

A great part of the happiness of life consists not in fighting battles, but in avoiding them. A masterly retreat is in itself a victory.

In old age our bodies are worn out instruments, on which the soul in vain tries to play the melodies of youth. But because the instrument has lost its strings, or is out of tune, it does not follow that the musician has lost his skill.

So innate and strong is the love of liberty in all human hearts that, even against our better judgment, we instinctively sympathise with criminals escaping from prison.

Nothing is more dangerous to an author than sudden success. The patience of genius is one of its most precious attributes.

It is a great mystery to many people that an author should reveal to the public secrets that he shrinks from telling to his most intimate friends.

More and more do I feel as I advance in life, how little we really know of each other. Friend-

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

ship seems to me like the touch of musical glasses — it is only contact; but the glasses themselves, and their contents, remain quite distinct and unmingled.

The highest exercise of imagination is not to devise what has no existence, but rather to perceive what really exists, though unseen by the outward eye — not creation, but insight.

How sudden and sweet are the visitations of our happiest thoughts; what delightful surprises! In the midst of life's most trivial occupations — as we are reading a newspaper, or lighting our bed-candle, or waiting for our horses to drive round — the lovely face appears; and thoughts more precious than gold are whispered in our ear.

Style is the gait of the mind, and is as much a part of the man as his bodily gait is.

The difference between a man of genius seen in his works and in his person, is like that of a light-house seen by night and by day — in the one case only a great fiery brain, in the other only a white tower.

What discord should we bring into the universe if our prayers were all answered! Then *we* should govern the world, and not God. And do you think we should govern it better? It gives me only pain when I hear the long, wearisome petitions of men asking for they know not what. As frightened women clutch at the

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

reins when there is danger, so do we grasp at God's government with our prayers. Thanksgiving with a full heart—and the rest silence and submission to the divine will!

THE SHAPING OF "EXCELSIOR"

[The following pages have been taken from an essay in "Men of Letters" by the late Horace E. Scudder, permission being granted by Houghton, Mifflin & Co., Boston, who published the book and own the copyright.]

Spread open in one of the cases of the Harvard University Library are the first and second drafts of "Excelsior," and a rare chance is given of seeing how a poet, when he has seized upon the central thought of a poem, will sometimes work industriously at its final form. The first draft was written upon the blank spaces of a letter from Charles Sumner.

The first stanza, with its erasures, is as follows:—

The shades of night were falling fast

When through an Alpine village pass'd

~~through~~ snow and ice

bore ~~above all price~~

'mid

A youth who ~~as the peasant sang~~

A banner with the strange device

~~Responded in an unknown tongue,~~

Excelsior!

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

The poet's first attempt was at a contrasted image of the peasant's humble life with its contentment, and the aspiration of the youth unintelligible to the peasant in the valley. It was too soon to introduce this contrast; he resolved to show the youth only, not speaking, but silently displaying his symbol, precious however to himself. Then the preciousness appeared commonplace or necessarily involved in the very action of the youth, and the poet returned to the idea of a contrast, but this time a contrast of cold, indifferent nature and passionate, spiritual man. What an immense advance in fulness of expression! It is curious, however, that in the second draft, on another paper, also preserved, the poet returned to this idea and tried again—

A youth who bore a pearl of price,—

possibly seeking to connect the image with the Biblical one in order to suggest the interpretation of his parable by linking it with an accepted image of spiritual contempt of the world. There is a slight verbal correction also in '*mid* for *through*, as if the physical difficulty of *through ice* annoyed him. The second stanza in the first draft reads:

his eye beneath
His brow was sad; ~~but underneath~~
Flash'd like a falchion from its sheath

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

~~His steel blue eye~~

rung

And like a silver clarion ~~sung,~~

The accents of that

~~His sweet voice in an~~ unknown tongue,

Excelsior !

Here he was dissatisfied as soon as he had half completed the third line, for he had finished the idea and had half a line to spare. He went back, struck out *but underneath*, wrote *his eye beneath*, which instantly gave him the compactness he wished and a straightforwardness of construction also. Then, probably, when he had said that his sweet voice sung like a silver clarion, he reflected that a clarion rung rather than sung, and changing his word, he saw that in the accents of the tongue he had a more ringing power than he had in a sweet voice, and certainly not only is the measure of the last line now better, but there has been a great access of virility; the mere change of *sung* to *rung* has lifted the third line into something like a trumpet-note.

In the third stanza, the first draft showed only two slight alterations; in the first line he wrote *humble homes*, which he changed to *happy homes*, thus presenting a stronger contrast to the youth's loneliness, and in the second he changed *pure and bright* to *clear and bright*, but the whole stanza was unsatisfactory as it then stood:

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

In happy homes he saw the light

Of household fires gleam clear and bright,

And far o'erhead the glaciers shone,

His lips breath'd with a stifled groan,

Excelsior!

The labour appears in the second draft, where the first two lines are the same, but the second two are thus worked over:

Above the spectral

~~And far above the glaciers shone;~~

And from his lips escaped a

~~His lips repress'd the rising groan.~~

Not only is the rhythm better in this last line, but the action is far more poetic, while both lines have gained in nervous force and in their connection with each other. As first written, there was an awkward halt at the close of the third line. In the final revision one other change was introduced by making the fires gleam *warm and bright* instead of *clear and bright*, which was a weak redundancy, while warm also intensifies the contrast.

The fourth stanza came easily. The first three lines were unchanged in the first draft or the second, and stood as they do in the

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

printed form. The fourth line in the first draft appeared:

his clarion
And clear ~~that youthful~~ voice replied;

in the second draft, it was

loud
And ~~clear~~ his clarion voice replied;

in the poem it now reads

And loud that clarion voice replied.

Slight changes these, but in the direction of euphony and picturesqueness. It may be said that *youthful* in its contrast to the *old man* was preferable, but it was not so euphonic, and *clarion*, though used before, was probably taken as suggesting, with loudness, the spiritual cry of the young man heard above the physical voice of the tempest and torrent,

There is some uncertainty in deciphering the erasures of the fifth stanza. In the corrections, however, there is no singular variation of form except that in the third line, *pale blue eye* became altered to *bright blue eye*; possibly the poet at first meant to indicate his weariness by *pale*, and then resolved to give rather his resolution in *bright*.

In the sixth stanza *the pine tree's withered branch* is an improvement upon the first form, which appeared in both drafts, *the withered pine*

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

tree's branch and *awful avalanche* was first the tamer *falling avalanche*.

The seventh stanza was wholly rewritten, and recast. Besides the lineal erasures, lines are drawn downward, marking out the whole, and a new stanza takes its place.

And as the

~~The pious~~ monks of Saint Bernard

In haste the convent gate unbarr'd

They

~~And~~ heard amid the falling snow

More faint that smothered voice of woe,

Excelsior!

This was clearly abrupt in transition and false also to the thought of the poem, for it was no part of the poet's intention to characterise the cry as a smothered voice of woe; so he rewrote it as it now stands, except that in the second draft he wrote *startled air* for *frosty* and *clear cold* successively, a change which added a new and striking effect. The immense improvement in the new stanza is apparent at a glance, since in the turn of the poem the very action of the monks is subtly connected with the aspiration of the youth.

The first two lines of the last stanza but one gave the poet some trouble before he could

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

find the most fit expression. In the first draft he wrote without erasure —

And guided by the faithful hound,

A frozen, lifeless corse they found;

Still grasping in his hand of ice

The banner with the strange device,

Excelsior!

In the second draft the first two lines appear:

A traveller, by

~~Buried in snow~~ the faithful hound

Half buried in the snow was

~~Far up the pass a traveller~~ found

The form in the first draft was probably chosen before the original seventh stanza was discarded. Certainly the omission of the pious monks in the final discovery is a gain; the loneliness of the youth is intensified when he is discovered not by one of his own race, but by a hound. Once more, as in the beginning, there, is as it were, a resolution into nature, and the youth, the snow and ice, and a dumb creature remain.

The first two lines of the last stanza stand in print as they were first written, but the last two lines show the poet's fatigue at the close of

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

his work. He had his idea perfected, but his mind stumbled over the right words. Thus the first draft is as follows:

~~And~~

~~His lips had caught the clear of day~~

serene

And from the ~~deep~~ sky, ~~faint~~ and far
fell

A voice ~~dropped~~ like a falling star,

Excelsior!

He did not know it then, but he had really finished his poem, for when he came later to write his second draft, he made his correction over again:

serene

And from the ~~deep~~ sky, ~~faint~~ and far

At the bottom of the first draft are the words, "September 28, 1841. Half-past three o'clock, morning. Now to bed." He wrote first September 27, and then remembered that he had reached the next day and changed the 7 to 8. If any one is curious to know the day of the week, it was Monday night that the poet sat up to write this poem. Sumner's letter to him is dated merely Thursday, so one can imagine that he had answered it and now had it lying by him as waste paper.

The study of the growth of a poem is an

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

interesting and curious business, yet after all how little one really sees of the poet at work. Somehow or other, as Lowell says regarding Hawthorne, apropos of his note-books, you look through the key-hole and think you will catch the secret of the alchemist, but at the critical moment his back is turned toward you. It is rare, however, that one has so good an opportunity as this of seeing the shaping of a poetic idea.

EDGAR ALLAN POE

[The best edition of Poe's works, edited by Clarence E. Stedman and George E. Woodberry, is published in ten volumes by Duffield & Co. New York.

In the "American Men of Letters" series published by Houghton, Mifflin & Co., Boston, is Edgar Allan Poe, by George E. Woodberry, himself an eminent poet and critic. From his judgment of Poe is taken:

"On the roll of our literature Poe's name is inscribed with the few foremost, and in the world at large his genius is established as valid among all men. Much as he derived nurture from other sources he was the son of Coleridge by the weird touch in his imagination, by the principles of his analytical criticism, and the speculative bent of his mind. An artist primarily, whose skill, helped by the finest sensitive and perceptive powers in himself, was developed by thought, patience, and endless self-correction into a subtle deftness of hand unsurpassed in its own work, he belonged to the men of culture instead of those of originally perfect power; but being gifted with the dreaming instinct, the myth-making faculty, the allegorizing power, and with no other poetic element of high genius, he exercised his art in a region of vague feeling, symbolic ideas, and fantastic imagery, and wrought his spell largely through sensuous effects of colour, sound, and gloom, heightened by lurking but unshaped suggestion of mysterious meanings. Now and then gleams of light and scratches of lovely landscape shine out, but for the most part his mastery was over dismal, superstitious, and waste places."]

YOUTHFUL ASPIRATIONS

FROM A LETTER QUOTED IN THE "YANKEE AND
BOSTON LITERARY GAZETTE," DECEMBER, 1829

I AM young — not yet twenty — *am* a poet
— if deep worship of all beauty can make me

one — and wish to be so in the more common meaning of the word. I would give the world to embody one-half the ideas afloat in my imagination. (By the way, do you remember — or did you ever read the exclamation of Shelley about Shakespeare? — “What a number of ideas must have been afloat before such an author could arise!”) I appeal to you as a man that loves the same beauty that I adore — the beauty of the natural blue sky and the sunshiny earth — there can be no tie more strong than that of brother for brother — it is not so much that they love one another, as that they both love the same parent — their affections are always running in the same direction — the same channel — and cannot help mingling.

I am, and have been from my childhood, an idler. It cannot therefore be said that

I left a calling for this idle trade,
A duty broke, a father disobeyed —

for I have no father nor mother.

I am, about to publish a volume of poems, the greater part written before I was fifteen. Speaking about heaven, the editor of the *Yankee* says, “He might write a beautiful, if not a magnificent poem” (the very first words of encouragement I ever remember to have heard). I am very certain that as yet I have not written *either* — but that I *can*, I will take oath, if they will give me time.

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

The poems to be published are "Al Aaraaf" and "Tamerlane," one about four, the other about three hundred lines. "Al Aaraaf" has some good poetry, and much extravagance which I have not had time to throw away.

WHAT POETRY IS

[FROM A LETTER TO MR. B——]

WEST POINT, —, 1831.

A poem, in my opinion, is opposed to a work of science by having, for its *immediate* object, pleasure, not truth; to romance, by having, for its object, an *indefinite* instead of a *definite* pleasure, being a poem only so far as this object is attained; romance presenting perceptible images with definite, poetry with *indefinite* sensations, to which end music is an *essential*, since the comprehension of sweet sound is our most indefinite conception. Music, when combined with a pleasurable idea, is poetry; music, without the idea, is simply music; the idea, without the music, is prose, from its very definiteness.

ON HIS TALES

[TO PHILIP P. COOKE]

NEW YORK, August 9, 1846.

Never think of excusing yourself (to me) for dilatoriness in answering letters — I know too well the unconquerable procrastination which besets the poet. I will place it all to the

accounts of the turkeys. Were I to be seized by a rambling fit, one of my customary *passions* (nothing less) for vagabondising through the woods for a week or a month together, I would not—in fact I *could* not—be put out of my mood, were it even to answer a letter from the Grand Mogul informing me that I had fallen heir to his possessions.

Thank you for the compliments. Were I in a serious humour just now, I would tell you frankly how your words of appreciation make my nerves thrill — not because you praise me (for others have praised me more lavishly) but because I feel that you comprehend and discriminate. You are right about the hair-splitting of my French friend — that is all done for effect. These tales of ratiocination owe most of their popularity to being something in a new key — I do not mean to say that they are not ingenious — but people think them more ingenious than they are — on account of their method, and *air* of method. In the “Murders in the Rue Morgue,” for instance, where is the ingenuity of unraveling a web which you yourself (the author) have woven for the express purpose of unraveling? The reader is made to confound the ingenuity of the supposititious Dupin with that of the writer of the story.

Not for the world would I have had any one else to continue Lowell's memoir until I had heard from you. I wish *you* to do it (if you will be so kind) and nobody else. By the time the

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

book appears you will be famous (or all my prophecy goes for nothing), and I shall have the *éclat* of your name to aid my sales. But seriously I do not think that any one so well enters into the poetical portion of my mind as yourself — and I deduce this idea from my intense appreciation of those points of your own poetry which seem lost upon others.

Should you undertake the work for me, there is one topic — there is one particular in which I have had wrong done me, and it may not be indecorous in me to call your attention to it. The last selection of my Tales was made from about seventy, Wiley and Putnam's reader, Duyckinck. He has what he thinks a taste for ratiocination, and has accordingly made up the book mostly of analytic stories. But this is not *representing* my mind in its various phases — it is not giving me fair play. In writing these Tales one by one, at long intervals, I have kept the book-unity always in mind — that is, each has been composed with reference to its effect as part of a *whole*. In this view, one of my chief aims has been the widest diversity of subject, thought, and especially *tone* and manner of handling. Were all my tales now before me in a large volume, and as the composition of another, the merit which would principally arrest my attention would be the wide *diversity and variety*. You will be surprised to hear me say that (omitting one or two of my first efforts) I do not consider any one of my

Edgar Allan Poe

stories *better* than another. There is a vast variety of kinds, and, in degree of value, the kinds vary — but each tale is equally good of *its kind*. The loftiest kind is that of the highest imagination — and for this reason only “*Ligeia*” may be called my *best* tale. I have much improved this last since you saw it, and I mail you a copy, as well as a copy of my best specimen of analysis — “The Philosophy of Composition.” . . .

POETRY A PASSION, NOT A STUDY

[*Southern Literary Messenger*, JULY, 1836]

. . . Against the subtleties which would make poetry a study — not a passion — it becomes the metaphysician to reason — but the poet to protest. Yet Wordsworth and Coleridge are men in years; the one imbued in contemplation from his childhood, the other a giant in intellect and in learning. The diffidence, then, with which I venture to dispute their authority, would be overwhelming did I not feel, from the bottom of my heart, that learning has little to do with the imagination — intellect with the passions — or age with poetry. . . .

“Trifles, like straws, upon the surface flow,
He who would search for pearls must dive below,”

are lines which have done much mischief. As regards the greater truths, men oftener err by

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

seeking them at the bottom than at the top; the depth lies in the huge abysses where wisdom is sought — not in the palpable places where she is found. The ancients were not always right in hiding the goddess in a well; witness the light which Bacon has thrown upon philosophy; witness the principles of our divine faith — that moral mechanism by which the simplicity of a child may overbalance the wisdom of a man. . . .

WRITING EVOKES THOUGHT

Some Frenchman, possibly Montaigne, says: "People talk about thinking, but for my part I never think, except when I sit down to write." It is this never thinking, unless we sit down to write, which is the cause of so much indifferent composition. But perhaps there is something more involved in the Frenchman's observations than meets the eye. It is certain that the mere act of inditing tends, in a great degree, to the logicalisation of thought. Whenever, on account of its vagueness, I am dissatisfied with a conception of the brain, I resort forthwith to the pen, for the purpose of obtaining, through its aid, the necessary form, consequence, and precision.

How very commonly we hear it remarked, that such and such thoughts are beyond the compass of words! I do not believe that any thought, properly so called, is out of the reach of language. I fancy, rather, that where

Edgar Allan Poe

difficulty in expression is experienced, there is, in the intellect which experiences it, a want either of deliberateness or of method. For my own part, I have never had a thought which I could not set down in words, with even more distinctness than that with which I conceived it.

There is, however, a class of fancies, of exquisite delicacy, which are not thoughts, and to which, *as yet*, I have found it absolutely impossible to adapt language. I use the word *fancies* at random, and merely because I must use *some* word; but the idea commonly attached to the term is not even remotely applicable to the shadows in question. They seem rather psychal than intellectual. They arise in the soul (alas, how rarely!) only at its epochs of most intense tranquillity — when the bodily and mental health are in perfection — and at those mere points of time where the confines of the waking world blend with the world of dreams. I am aware of the “fancies” only when I am upon the very brink of sleep, with the consciousness that I am so. I have satisfied myself that this condition exists but for an inappreciable point of time — yet it is crowded with those “shadows of shadows”; and for absolute *thought* there is demanded time’s *endurance*.

HOW POE REVISED “THE RAVEN”

Poe’s Works, edited by Edmund Clarence Stedman and George E. Woodberry, are pub-

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

lished in ten volumes by Duffield & Co., New York. The tenth volume gives the poems, with their successive revisions in detail, showing that Poe was tireless in the refinement of his work. How "The Raven" gradually assumed its final form is thus traced:

Originally the poem appeared in the *Evening Mirror*, January 29, 1845; then in the *American Whig Review*, February, 1845; next in the *Broadway Journal*, 1845, here referred to by their initials.

Readings which vary from the text as finally revised:

Stanza II., line 3. Sought || tried.—A. W. R; B. J.

Stanza V., line 3. Stillness || darkness. — A. W. R; B. J.

Stanza VI., line 1. Back || Then. — A. W. R; B. J.

Stanza VI., line 2. Again I heard || I heard again; something || somewhat. — A. W. R; B. J.

Stanza VII., line 3. Minute || instant. — A. W. R; B. J. Moment "Poe's Philosophy of Composition."

Stanza IX., line 3. Living human || sublunary. — A. W. R.

Stanza X., line 1. That || the.—A.W. R.; B. J.

Stanza X., line 6. Then the bird said || Quoth the raven. — A. W. R.

Stanza XI., line 1. Startled || wondering. — A. W. R.

Stanza XI., line 4-6. Till . . . nevermore ||

so when Hope he would adjure. Stern Despair returned, instead of the sweet Hope he dared adjure. That sad answer "Nevermore." — A. W. R.

Stanza XI., line 5. That || the. — B. J.

Stanza XI., line 6. Of "Nevermore" — of "Nevermore." — B. J.

Stanza XIV., line 2. Seraphim whose || angels whose faint. — A. W. R., B. J.

Stanza XIV., line 5. Quaff, oh || Let me. — A. W. R.

Stanza XVIII., line 3, Demon's || demon. — A. W. R; B. J.

ALFRED TENNYSON

SUGGESTIONS FOR "THE PRINCESS"

[Mr. Samuel E. Dawson, in his "Study of 'The Princess' " published by Dawson Brothers, Montreal, 1884, gives this letter from Tennyson. It affords a unique glimpse of the poet's methods of composition. — Ed.]

ALDWORTH, HASLEMERE, Surrey,

November 21, 1882

I thank you for your able and thoughtful essay on "The Princess." You have seen, amongst other things, that if women were ever to play such freaks, the burlesque and the tragic might go hand in hand. . . . Your explanatory notes are very much to the purpose, and I do not object to your finding parallelisms. They must always recur. A man (a Chinese scholar) some time ago wrote to me saying that in an unknown, untranslated Chinese poem there were two whole lines of mine, almost word for word. Why not? Are not human eyes all over the world looking at the same objects, and must there not consequently be coincidences of thought and impressions and expressions? It is scarcely possible for any one to say or write anything in this late time of the world to which in the rest of the literature of the world a parallel could not somewhere be found. But when you say that this passage or that was

Alfred Tennyson

suggested by Wordsworth or Shelley or another, I demur; and more, I wholly disagree. There was a period in my life when, as an artist, Turner for instance, takes rough sketches of landskip, etc., in order to work from them into some great picture, so I was in the habit of chronicling, in four or five words or more, whatever might strike me as picturesque in nature. I never put these down, and many and many a line has gone away on the north wind, but some remain: for example:

A full sea glazed with muffled moonlight.

Suggestion

The sea one night at Torquay, when Torquay was the most lovely sea-village in England, though now a smoky town. The sky was covered with thin vapour, and the moon was behind it.

A great black cloud
Dragged inward from the deep.

Suggestion

A coming storm seen from the top of Snowdon.

In the "Idylls of the King."

with all
Its stormy crest that smote against the skies

Suggestion

A storm which came upon us in the middle
of the North Sea.

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

“As the water-lily starts and slides.”

Suggestion

Water-lilies in my own pond, seen on a gusty day with my own eyes. They did start and slide in the sudden puffs of wind till caught and stayed by the tether of their own stalks, quite as true as Wordsworth's simile and more in detail.

A wild wind shook —
Follow, follow, thou shall win

Suggestion

I was walking in the New Forest. A wind did arise and —

Shake the songs, the whispers and the shrieks
Of the wild wood together.

The wind I believe was a west wind, but because I wished the Prince to go south, I turned the wind to the south, and naturally the wind said “follow.” I believe the resemblance which you note is just a chance one. Shelley's lines are not familiar to me though of course, if they occur in the “Prometheus,” I must have read them. I could multiply instances, but I will not bore you, and far indeed am I from asserting that books as well as nature are not, and ought not to be, suggestive to the poet. I am sure that I myself, and many others, find a peculiar charm in those passages of such great

masters as Virgil or Milton where they adopt the creation of a bygone poet, and reclothe it more or less, according to their own fancy. But there is, I fear, a prosaic set growing up among us, editors of booklets, book-worms, index-hunters, or men of great memories and no imagination, who *impute themselves* to the poet and so believe that *he*, too, has no imagination, but is forever poking his nose between the pages of some old volume in order to see what he can appropriate. They will not allow one to say "Ring the bells," without finding that we had taken it from Sir P. Sidney, or even to use such a simple expression as the ocean "roars," without finding the precise verse in Homer or Horace from which we have plagiarised it (fact!).

I have known an old fish-wife, who had lost two sons at sea, clench her fist at the advancing tide on a stormy day, and cry out, "Ay, roar! do! How I hates to see thee show thy white teeth!" Now if I had adopted her exclamation and put it into the mouth of some old woman in one of my poems, I daresay the critics would have thought it original enough, but would most likely have advised me to go to nature for my old women and not to my own imagination; and indeed it is a strong figure.

Here is another anecdote about suggestion. When I was about twenty or twenty-one I went on a tour to the Pyreñees. Lying among these mountains before a waterfall that comes

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

down one thousand or twelve hundred feet I sketched it (according to my custom then) in these words:

Slow-dropping veils of thinnest lawn.

When I printed this, a critic informed me that "lawn" was the material used in theatres to imitate a waterfall, and graciously added, "Mr. T. should not go to the boards of a theatre but to nature herself for his suggestions." And I *had* gone to nature herself.

I think it is a moot point whether, if I had known how that effect is produced on the stage, I should have ventured to publish the line.

I find that I have written, quite contrary to my custom, a letter, when I had merely intended to thank you for your interesting commentary.

Thanking you again for it, I beg you to believe me, very faithfully yours,

A. TENNYSON.

ROBERT BURNS

[Thomas Carlyle in his essay on Burns has said:

"The excellence of Burns is among the rarest whether in poetry or prose, but, at the same time, it is plain and easily recognised: his sincerity, his indisputable air of truth. Here are no fabulous woes or joys; no hollow fantastic sentimentalities; no wire-drawn refinings, either in thought or feeling; the passion that is traced before us has glowed in a living heart; the opinion he utters has risen in his own understanding, and has been a light to his own steps. He does not write from hearsay, but from sight and experience; it is the scenes he has lived and laboured amidst that he describes. Those scenes, rude and humble as they are, have kindled beautiful emotions in his soul, noble thoughts and definite resolves; and he speaks forth what is in him, not from any outward call of vanity or interest, but because his heart is too full to be silent. He speaks it, too, with such melody and modulation as he can; "in homely rustic jingle," but it is his own, and genuine. This is the grand secret for finding readers and retaining them, let him who would move and convince others, be first moved and convinced himself. To every poet, to every writer, we might say, Be true, if you would be believed. Let a man but speak forth with genuine earnestness the thought, the emotion, the actual condition, of his own heart; and other men, so strangely are we all knit together by the tie of sympathy, must and will give heed to him."]

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

[TO DR. MOORE]

MAUCHLINE, August 2, 1787.

For some months past I have been rambling over the country, but I am now confined with

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

some lingering complaints, originating, as I take it, in the stomach. To divert my spirits a little in this miserable fog of ennui, I have taken a whim to give you a history of myself. My name has made some little noise in this country; you have done me the honour to interest yourself very warmly in my behalf; and I think a faithful account of what character of a man I am, and how I came by that character, may perhaps amuse you in an idle moment. I will give you an honest narrative, though I know it will be, often at my own expense; for I assure you, sir, I have, like Solomon, whose character, excepting in the trifling affair of wisdom, I sometimes think I resemble — I have, I say, like him turned my eyes to behold madness and folly, and like him, too, frequently shaken hands with their intoxicating friendship. After you have perused these pages, should you think them trifling and impertinent, I only beg leave to tell you that the poor author wrote them under some twitching qualms of conscience, arising from a suspicion that he was doing what he ought not to do; a predicament he has more than once been in before.

I have not the most distant pretensions to assume that character which the pye-coated guardians of escutcheons call a gentleman. When at Edinburgh last winter, I got acquainted in the Herald's office; and, looking through that granary of honours, I there found almost every name in the kingdom; but for me,

Robert Burns

My ancient but ignoble blood
Has crept thro' scoundrels ever since the flood.
Gules, purple, argent, etc., quite disowned me.

My father was of the north of Scotland, the son of a farmer, and was thrown by early misfortunes on the world at large; where, after many years' wanderings and sojournings, he picked up a pretty large quantity of observation and experience, to which I am indebted for most of my little pretensions to wisdom. I have met with few who understood men, their manners and their ways, equal to him; but stubborn, ungainly integrity, and headlong, ungovernable irascibility, are disqualifying circumstances; consequently, I was born a very poor man's son. For the first six or seven years of my life, my father was gardener to a worthy gentleman of small estate in the neighbourhood of Ayr. Had he continued in that station, I must have marched off to be one of the little underlings about a farmhouse; but it was his dearest wish and prayer to have it in his power to keep his children under his own eye, till they could discern between good and evil; so with the assistance of his generous master, my father ventured on a small farm on his estate.

AS A BOY

At those years, I was by no means a favourite with anybody. I was a good deal noted for a retentive memory, a stubborn sturdy something in my disposition, and an enthusiastic idiotic

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

piety. I say idiotic piety, because I was then but a child. Though it cost the schoolmaster some thrashings, I made an excellent English scholar; and by the time I was ten or eleven years of age, I was a critic in substantives, verbs, and particles. In my infant and boyish days, too, I owe much to an old woman who resided in the family, remarkable for her ignorance, credulity, and superstition. She had, I suppose, the largest collection in the country of tales and songs concerning devils, ghosts, fairies, brownies, witches, warlocks, spunkies, kelpies, elf-candles, dead-lights, wraiths, apparitions, cantraips, giants, enchanted towers, dragons, and other trumpery. This cultivated the latent seeds of poetry; but had so strong an effect on my imagination, that to this hour, in my nocturnal rambles, I sometimes keep a sharp lookout in suspicious places; and though nobody can be more sceptical than I am in such matters, yet it often takes an effort of philosophy to shake off these idle terrors.

EARLY READING

The earliest composition that I recollect taking pleasure in, was "The Vision of Mirza," and a hymn of Addison's beginning, "How are thy servants blest, O Lord!" I particularly remember one half-stanza which was music to my boyish ear —

For though on dreadful whirls we hung
High on the broken wave —

Robert Burns

I met with these pieces in Mason's English Collection, one of my schoolbooks. The first two books I ever read in private, and which gave me more pleasure than any two books I ever read since, were "The Life of Hannibal," and "The History of Sir William Wallace." Hannibal gave my young ideas such a turn, that I used to strut in raptures up and down after the recruiting drum and bagpipe, and wish myself tall enough to be a soldier; while the story of Wallace poured a Scottish prejudice into my veins, which will boil along there till the floodgates of life shut in eternal rest.

Polemical divinity about this time was putting the country half mad, and I, ambitious of shining in conversation parties on Sundays, between sermons, at funerals, etc., used a few years afterward to puzzle Calvinism with so much heat and indiscretion, that I raised a hue and cry of heresy against me, which has not ceased to this hour.

My vicinity to Ayr was of some advantage to me. My social disposition, when not checked by some modifications of spirited pride, was like our catechism definition of infinitude, without bounds or limits. I formed several connections with other youngers, who possessed superior advantages; the youngling actors who were busy in the rehearsal of parts, in which they were shortly to appear on the stage of life, where, alas! I was destined to drudge behind the scenes. It is not commonly at this green age,

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

that our young gentry have a just sense of the immense distance between them and their ragged playfellows. It takes a few dashes into the world to give the young great man that proper, decent, unnoticing disregard for the poor, insignificant, stupid devils, the mechanics and peasantry around him, who were, perhaps, born in the same village. My young superiors never insulted the clouterly appearance of my plough-boy carcase, the two extremes of which were often exposed to all the inclemencies of all the seasons. They would give me stray volumes of books; among them, even then, I could pick up some observations, and one, whose heart, I am sure, not even the "Munny Begum" scenes have tainted, helped me to a little French. Parting with these my young friends and benefactors, as they occasionally went off for the East or West Indies, was often to me a sore affliction; but I was soon called to more serious evils. My father's generous master died, the farm proved a ruinous bargain; and to clench the misfortune, we fell into the hands of a factor, who sat for the picture I have drawn of one in my tale of "Twa Dogs." My father was advanced in life when he married; I was the eldest of seven children, and he, worn out by early hardships, was unfit for labour. My father's spirit was soon irritated, but not easily broken. There was a freedom in his lease in two years more, and to weather these two years, we retrenched our expenses. We lived very

Robert Burns

poorly; I was a dexterous ploughman for my age; and the next eldest to me was a brother (Gilbert), who could drive the plough very well, and help me to thrash the corn. A novel-writer might, perhaps, have viewed these scenes with some satisfaction, but so did not I; my indignation yet boils at the recollection of the scoundrel factor's insolent threatening letters, which used to set us all in tears.

BEGINS RHYMING

This kind of life — the cheerless gloom of a hermit, with the unceasing moil of a galley slave, brought me to my sixteenth year; a little before which period I first committed the sin of rhyme. You know our country custom of coupling a man and woman together as partners in the labours of harvest. In my fifteenth autumn, my partner was a bewitching creature, a year younger than myself. My scarcity of English denies me the power of doing her justice in that language, but you know the Scottish idiom: she was a "bonnie, sweet, sonsie (engaging) lass." In short, she, altogether unwittingly to herself, initiated me in that delicious passion, which, in spite of acid disappointment, gin-horse prudence, and book-worm philosophy, I hold to be the first of human joys, our dearest blessing here below! How she caught the contagion I cannot tell; you medical people talk much of infection from breathing the same air, the touch, etc., but I never expressly

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

said I loved her. Indeed I did not know myself why I liked so much to loiter behind with her, when returning in the evening from our labours; why the tones of her voice made my heartstrings thrill like an Æolian harp; and particularly why my pulse beat such a furious ratan, when I looked and fingered over her little hand to pick out the cruel nettle-stings and thistles. Among her other love-inspiring qualities, she sung sweetly; and it was her favourite reel to which I attempted giving an embodied vehicle in rhyme. I was not so presumptuous as to imagine that I could make verses like printed ones, composed by men who had Greek and Latin; but my girl sung a song which was said to be composed by a small country laird's son, on one of his father's maids, with whom he was in love; and I saw no reason why I might not rhyme as well as he; for, excepting that he could smear sheep, and cast peats, his father living in the moorlands, he had no more scholar-craft than myself.

Thus with me began love and poetry, which at times have been my only, and till within the last twelve months, have been my highest, enjoyment. My father struggled on till he reached the freedom in his lease, when he entered on a larger farm, about ten miles farther in the country. The nature of the bargain he made was such as to throw a little ready money into his hands at the commencement of his lease, otherwise the affair would have been impracti-

cable. For four years we lived comfortably here, but a difference commencing between him and his landlord as to terms, after three years' tossing and whirling in the vortex of litigation, my father was just saved from the horrors of a jail, by a consumption, which, after two years' promises, kindly stepped in, and carried him away, to where the wicked cease from troubling, and where the weary are at rest!

A DILIGENT READER

It is during the time that we lived on this farm that my little story is most eventful. I was, at the beginning of this period, perhaps the most ungainly, awkward boy in the parish — no hermit was less acquainted with the ways of the world. What I knew of ancient story was gathered from Salmon's and Guthrie's Geographical Grammars; and the ideas I had formed of modern manners, of literature, and criticism, I got from the Spectator. These, with Pope's Works, some Plays of Shakespeare, Tull and Dickson on Agriculture, The "Pantheon," Locke's "Essay on the Human Understanding," Stackhouse's "History of the Bible," Justice's "British Gardener's Directory," Boyle's "Lectures," Allan Ramsay's Works, Taylor's "Scripture Doctrine of Original Sin," "A Select Collection of English Songs," and Hervey's "Meditations," had formed the whole of my reading. The collection of songs was my companion, day and night. I pored over them,

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

driving my cart, or walking to labour, song by song, verse by verse; carefully noting the true, tender, or sublime, from affectation and fustian. I am convinced I owe to this practice much of my critic-craft, such as it is.

POVERTY AT HOME

In my seventeenth year, to give my manners a brush, I went to a country dancing-school. My father had an unaccountable antipathy against these meetings, and my going was, what to this moment I repent, in opposition to his wishes. My father, as I said before, was subject to strong passions; from that instance of disobedience in me he took a sort of dislike to me, which, I believe, was one cause of the dissipation which marked my succeeding years. I say dissipation, comparatively with the strictness, and sobriety, and regularity of Presbyterian country life; for though the will-o'-wisp meteors of thoughtless whim were almost the sole lights of my path, yet early ingrained piety and virtue kept me for several years afterward within the line of innocence. The great misfortune of my life was to want an aim. I had felt early some stirrings of ambition, but they were the blind gropings of Homer's Cyclops round the walls of his cave. I saw my father's situation entailed on me perpetual labour. The only two openings by which I could enter the temple of fortune were the gate of niggardly economy, or the path of little chicaning bargain-making. The first

is so contracted an aperture I never could squeeze myself into it; the last I always hated — there was contamination in the very entrance! Thus abandoned of aim or view in life, with a strong appetite for sociability, as well from native hilarity as from a pride of observation and remark; a constitutional melancholy or hypochondriasm that made me fly solitude; add to these incentives to social life, my reputation for bookish knowledge, a certain wild logical talent, and a strength of thought, something like the rudiments of good sense; and it will not seem surprising that I was generally a welcome guest where I visited, or any great wonder that always, where two or three met together, there was I among them. But far beyond all other impulses of my heart, was a leaning toward the adorable half of humankind. My heart was completely tinder, and was eternally lighted up by some goddess or other; and, as in every other warfare in this world, my fortune was various; sometimes I was received with favour, and sometimes I was mortified with a repulse. At the plough, scythe, or reap-hook I feared no competitor, and thus I set absolute want at defiance; and as I never cared further for my labours than while I was in actual exercise, I spent the evenings in the way after my own heart.

NEW EXPERIENCES

Another circumstance in my life which made some alteration in my mind and manners, was,

that I spent my nineteenth summer on a smuggling coast, a good distance from home, at a noted school, to learn mensuration, surveying, dialling, etc. in which I made a pretty good progress. But I made a greater progress in the knowledge of mankind. The contraband trade was at that time very successful, and it sometimes happened to me to fall in with those who carried it on. Scenes of swaggering riot and roaring dissipation were, till this time, new to me; but I was no enemy to social life.

My reading meantime was enlarged with the very important addition of Thomson's and Shenstone's Works. I had seen human nature in a new phase; and I engaged several of my schoolfellows to keep up a literary correspondence with me. This improved me in composition. I had met with a collection of letters by the wits of Queen Anne's reign, and pored over them most devoutly. I kept copies of any of my own letters that pleased me, and a comparison between them and the composition of most of my correspondents flattered my vanity. I carried this whim so far that, though I had not three-farthings' worth of business in the world, yet almost every post brought me as many letters as if I had been a broad plodding son of the day-book and ledger.

BEGINS HIS SONGS

My life flowed on much in the same course till my twenty-third year. The addition of two

Robert Burns

more authors to my library gave me great pleasure; Sterne and Mackenzie — “Tristram Shandy” and the “Man of Feeling” — were my bosom favourites. Poesy was still a darling walk for my mind, but it was only indulged in according to the humour of the hour. I had usually half a dozen or more pieces on hand; I took up one or other, as it suited the momentary tone of the mind, and dismissed the work as it bordered on fatigue. My passions, when once lighted up, raged like so many devils, till they got vent in rhyme; and then the conning over my verses, like a spell, soothed all into quiet! None of the rhymes of those days are in print, except, “Winter, a Dirge,” the eldest of my printed pieces; “The Death of Poor Maillie,” “John Barleycorn.” and Songs First, Second and Third. Song Second was the ebullition of that passion which ended the forementioned school-business.

My twenty-third year, was to me an important era. Partly through whim, and partly that I wished to set about doing something in life, I joined a flax-dresser in a neighbouring town (Irvine), to learn the trade. This was an unlucky affair. As we were giving a welcome carousal to the new year, the shop took fire and burned to ashes, and I was left, like a true poet, not worth a sixpence.

I was obliged to give up this scheme, the clouds of misfortune were gathering thick round my father's head; and, what was worst of all, he

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

was visibly far gone in a consumption; and to crown my distresses, a beautiful girl, whom I adored, and who had pledged her soul to meet me in the field of matrimony, jilted me, with peculiar circumstances of mortification. The finishing evil that brought up the rear of this infernal file, was my constitutional melancholy being increased to such a degree, that for three months I was in a state of mind scarcely to be envied by the hopeless wretches who have got their mittimus — depart from me, ye cursed!

From this adventure I learned something of a town life; but the principal thing which gave my mind a turn, was a friendship I formed with a young fellow, a very noble character, but a hapless son of misfortune. He was the son of a simple mechanic; but a great man in the neighbourhood taking him under his patronage, gave him a genteel education, with a view of bettering his situation in life. The patron dying just as he was ready to launch out into the world, the poor fellow in despair went to sea; where, after a variety of good and ill fortune, a little before I was acquainted with him he had been set on shore by an American privateer, on the wild coast of Connaught, stripped of everything. I cannot quit this poor fellow's story without adding, that he is at this time master of a large West Indiaman belonging to the Thames.

His mind was fraught with independence, magnanimity, and every manly virtue. I

Robert Burns

loved and admired him to a degree of enthusiasm, and of course strove to imitate him. In some measure I succeeded; I had pride before, but he taught it to flow in proper channels. His knowledge of the world was vastly superior to mine, and I was all attention to learn. . . . My reading only increased while in this town by two stray volumes of "Pamela," and one of "Ferdinand Count Fathom," which gave me some idea of novels. Rhyme, except some religious pieces that are in print, I had given up; but meeting with Fergusson's Scottish Poems, I strung anew my wildly sounding lyre with emulating vigour. When my father died, his all went among the hell-hounds that growl in the kennel of justice; but we made a shift to collect a little money in the family amongst us, with which to keep us together, my brother and I took a neighbouring farm. My brother wanted my hare-brained imagination, as well as my social and amorous madness; but in good sense, and every sober qualification, he was far my superior.

FARMING AND POETRY

I entered on this farm with a full resolution, "come, go to, I will be wise!" I read farming books, I calculated crops; I attended markets; and in short, in spite of the devil, and the world, and the flesh, I believe I should have been a wise man; but the first year, from unfortunately buying bad seed, the second from a late harvest,

we lost half our crops. This upset all my wisdom, and I returned, "like the dog to his vomit, and the sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire."

I now began to be known in the neighbourhood as a maker of rhymes. The first of my poetic offspring that saw the light, was a burlesque lamentation on a quarrel between two reverend Calvinists, both of them figuring in my "Holy Fair." I had a notion myself that the piece had some merit; but, to prevent the worst, I gave a copy of it to a friend, who was very fond of such things, and told him that I could not guess who was the author of it, but that I thought it pretty clever. With a certain description of the clergy, as well as laity, it met with a roar of applause. "Holy Willie's Prayer" next made its appearance, and alarmed the kirk-session so much, that they held several meetings to look over their spiritual artillery, if haply any of it might be pointed against profane rhymers. Unluckily for me, my wanderings led me on another side, within point-blank shot of their heaviest metal. This is the unfortunate story that gave rise to my printed poem, "The Lament." This was a most melancholy affair, which I cannot yet bear to reflect on, and had very nearly given me one or two of the principal qualifications for a place among those who have lost the chart, and mistaken the reckoning of rationality. I gave up my part of the farm to my brother; in truth it was only

Robert Burns

nominally mine; and made what little preparation was in my power for Jamaica.

PUBLISHES HIS POEMS

But before leaving my native country forever, I resolved to publish my poems: I weighed my productions as impartially as was in my power; I thought they had merit; and it was a delicious idea that I should be called a clever fellow, even though it should never reach my ears — a poor Negro driver — or perhaps a victim to that inhospitable clime, and gone to the world of spirits! I can truly say that, poor and unknown as I then was, I had pretty nearly as high an idea of myself and of my works as I have at this moment, when the public has decided in their favour. It ever was my opinion that the mistakes and blunders, both in a rational and religious point of view, of which we see thousands daily guilty, are owing to their ignorance of themselves. To know myself had been all along my constant study. I weighed myself alone; I balanced myself with others. I watched every means of information, to see how much ground I occupied as a man and as a poet; I studied assiduously Nature's design in my formation — where the lights and shades in my character were intended. I was pretty confident my poems would meet with some applause; but at the worst, the roar of the Atlantic would deafen the voice of censure, and the novelty of West

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

Indian scenes make me forget neglect. I threw off six hundred copies, of which I had got subscriptions for about three hundred and fifty. My vanity was highly gratified by the reception I met with from the public; and besides I pocketed, all expenses deducted, nearly twenty pounds. This sum came very seasonably, as I was thinking of indenting myself for want of money to procure my passage. As soon as I was master of nine guineas, the price of wafting me to the torrid zone, I took a steerage passage in the first ship that was to sail from the Clyde, for

Hungry ruin had me in the wind.

I had been for some days skulking from covert to covert, under all the terrors of a jail; as some ill-advised people had uncoupled the merciless pack of the law at my heels. I had taken the last farewell of my few friends; my chest was on the road to Greenock; I had composed the last song I should ever measure in Caledonia — “The Gloomy Night Is Gathering Fast,” when a letter from Dr. Blacklock to a friend of mine, overthrew all my schemes, by opening new prospects to my poetic ambition. The doctor belonged to a set of critics for whose applause I had not dared to hope. His opinion, that I would meet with encouragement in Edinburgh for a second edition, fired me so much, that away I posted for that city, without a single acquaintance, or a single letter of introduction.

The baneful star that had so long shed its blasting influence in my zenith, for once made a revolution to the nadir; and a kind Providence placed me under the patronage of one of the noblest of men, the Earl of Glencairn. *Oublie moi, grand Dieu, si jamais je l'oublie* [Forget me, Great God, if I ever forget him!]

I need relate no further. At Edinburgh I was in a new world; I mingled among many classes of men, but all of them new to me, and I was all attention to "catch" the characters and "the manners living as they rise." Whether I have profited, time will show.

A POET TO EXCEL MUST LABOUR

TO DR. MOORE

ELLISLAND, 4th January, 1789.

. . . The character and employment of a poet were formerly my pleasure, but are now my pride. I know that a very great deal of my late *eclat* was owing to the singularity of my situation, and the honest prejudice of Scotsmen; but still, as I said in the preface to my first edition, I do look upon myself as having some pretensions from nature to the poetic character. I have not a doubt but the knack, the aptitude, to learn the muses' trade, is a gift bestowed by Him "who forms the secret bias of the soul"; but I as firmly believe that *excellence* in the profession is the fruit of industry, labour, attention, and pains. At least I am resolved to try

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

my doctrine by the test of experience. Another appearance from the press I put off to a very distant day, a day that may never arrive — but poesy I am determined to prosecute with all my vigour. Nature has given very few, if any, of the profession, the talents of shining in every species of composition. I shall try (for until trial it is impossible to know) whether she has qualified me to shine in any one. The worst of it is, by the time one has finished a piece, it has been so often viewed and reviewed before the mental eye, that one loses in a good measure, the power of critical discrimination. Here the best criterion I know is a friend — not only of abilities to judge, but with good nature enough like a prudent teacher with a young learner to praise a little more than is exactly just, lest the thin-skinned animal fall into that most deplorable of all diseases — heart-breaking despondency of himself. Dare I, sir, already immensely indebted to your goodness, ask the additional obligation of your being that friend to me? . . .

SOURCES OF INSPIRATION

[TO MRS. DUNLOP]

ELLISLAND, New Year Day Morning, 1789.

This, dear madam, is a morning of wishes, and would to God that I came under the Apostle James's description! — "the prayer of a righteous man availeth much." In that case,

madam, you should welcome in a year full of blessings: everything that obstructs or disturbs tranquillity and self-enjoyment should be removed, and every pleasure that frail humanity can taste should be yours. I own myself so little a Presbyterian, that I approve set times and seasons of more than ordinary acts of devotion, for breaking in on that habituated routine of life and thought which is so apt to reduce our existence to a kind of instinct, or even sometimes, and with some minds, to a state very little superior to mere machinery.

This day — the first Sunday of May — a breezy, blue-skied noon some time about the beginning, and a hoary morning and calm sunny day about the end, of autumn — these, time out of mind, have been with me a kind of holiday.

I believe I owe this to that glorious paper in the *Spectator*, "The Vision of Mirza," a piece that struck my young fancy before I was capable of fixing an idea to a word of three syllables: "On the 5th day of the moon, which, according to the custom of my forefathers, I always *keep holy*, after having washed myself and offered up my morning devotions, I ascended the high hill of Bagdad, in order to pass the rest of the day in meditation and prayer."

We know nothing, or next to nothing, of the substance or structure of our souls, so cannot account for those seeming caprices in them that one should be particularly pleased with

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

this thing, or struck with that, which on minds of a different cast makes no extraordinary impression. I have some favourite flowers in spring, among which are the mountain-daisy, the harebell, the foxglove, the wild-brier rose, the budding birch, and the hoary hawthorn, that I view and hang over with particular delight. I never hear the loud, solitary whistle of the curlew in a summer noon, or the wild mixing cadence of a troop of gray plovers in an autumnal morning, without feeling an elevation of soul like the enthusiasm of devotion or poetry. Tell me, my dear friend, to what can this be owing? Are we a piece of machinery, which, like the *Æolian* harp, passive takes the impression of the passing accident? Or do these workings argue something within us above the trodden clod? I own myself partial to such proofs of those awful and important realities — a God that made all things — man's immaterial and immortal nature — and a world of weal or woe beyond death and the grave! R. B.

SIR WALTER SCOTT

[In his "Choice of Books," published by the Macmillan Company, New York, Frederic Harrison, says:

"Scott is a perfect library in himself. A constant reader of romances would find that it needed months to go through even the best pieces of the inexhaustible painter of eight full centuries and every type of man; and he might repeat the process of reading him ten times in a life-time without a sense of fatigue or sameness. The poetic beauty of Scott's creations is almost the least of his great qualities. It is the universality of his sympathy that is so truly great, the justice of his estimates, the insight into the spirit of each age, his intense absorption of self in the vast epic of human civilisation. What are the old almanacs they so often give us as histories beside these living pictures of the ordered succession of ages? . . . He loves the councils of chiefs and the palace of the king; but the swine-herd, the charioteer, the slave-girl, the hound, the beggar, and the herdsman, all glow alike in the harmonious colouring of his peopled epic. We see the dawn of our English nation, the defence of Christendom against the Koran, the grace and the terror of feudalism, the rise of monarchy out of baronies, the rise of parliaments out of monarchy, the rise of industry out of serfage, the pathetic ruin of chivalry, the splendid death-struggle of Catholicism, the sylvan tribes of the mountains (remnants of our prehistoric forefathers) beating themselves to pieces against the hard advance of modern industry; we see the grim heroism of the Bible martyrs, the catastrophe of feudalism, overwhelmed by a practical age which knew little of its graces, and almost nothing of its virtues. Such is Scott, who, we may say, has done for the various phases of modern history, what Shakespeare has done for the manifold types of human character."

Lockhart's "Life of Scott" is esteemed second only to Boswell's Johnson among biographies. It depicts a great man as well as a great romancer. Its closing chapters tell

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

a story as pathetic as was ever penned by the Wizard himself. Scott was involved in the failure of the Ballantines, his publishers: in the honourable endeavour to pay off his debts, he undoubtedly hastened his death. Lockhart's Life and Scott's own Journal afford the autobiographical pages here given.]

DEBT TO LITERARY SOCIETIES

It is well known that in Edinburgh one great spur to emulation among youthful students is in those associations called literary societies, formed not only for the purpose of debate, but of composition. These undoubtedly have some disadvantages where a bold, petulant, and disputatious temper happens to be combined with considerable information and talent. Still, however, in order to such a person being actually spoiled by his mixing in such debates, his talents must be of a very rare nature, or his effrontery must be proof to every species of assault; for there is generally, in a well-selected society of this nature, talent sufficient to meet the forwardest, and satire enough to penetrate the most undaunted. I am particularly obliged to this sort of club for introducing me, about my seventeenth year, into society which at one time I had entirely dropped; for, from the time of my illness at college, I had had little or no intercourse with any of my class-companions, one or two only excepted. Now, however, about 1788, I began to feel and take my ground in society. A ready wit, a good deal of enthusiasm, and a perception that soon ripened into tact

and observation of character, rendered me an acceptable companion to many young men, whose acquisitions in philosophy and science were infinitely superior to anything I could boast.

A BACKWARD GLANCE AT HIS YOUTH

Looking back on these times, I cannot applaud in all respects the way in which our days were spent. There was too much idleness, and sometimes too much conviviality; but our hearts were warm, our minds honourably bent on knowledge and literary distinction; and if I, certainly the least informed of the party, may be permitted to bear witness, we were not without the fair and creditable means of attaining the distinction to which we aspired. In this society I was naturally led to correct my former useless course of reading; for — feeling myself greatly inferior to my companions in metaphysical philosophy and other branches of regular study — I laboured, not without some success, to acquire at least such a portion of knowledge as might enable me to maintain my rank in conversation. In this I succeeded pretty well; but unfortunately then, as often since through my life, I incurred the deserved ridicule of my friends from the superficial nature of my acquisitions, which being, in the mercantile phrase, got up for society, very often proved flimsy in the texture; and thus the gifts of an uncommonly retentive memory and acute powers of perception were sometimes detri-

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

mental to their possessor, by encouraging him to a presumptuous reliance upon them.

LEARNED SOMETHING FROM EVERYBODY

December 27, 1825.—Worked at Pepys in the evening, with the purpose of review for Lockhart. Notwithstanding the depressing effects of the calomel, I feel the pleasure of being alone and uninterrupted. Few men, leading a quiet life, and without any strong or highly varied change of circumstances, have seen more variety of society than I — few have enjoyed it more, or been *bored*, as it is called, less by the company of tiresome people. I have rarely, if ever, found any one, out of whom I could not extract amusement or edification; and were I obliged to account for hints afforded on such occasions, I should make an ample deduction from my inventive powers. Still, however, from the earliest time I can remember, I preferred the pleasure of being alone to waiting for visitors, and have often taken a bannock and a bit of cheese to the wood or hill, to avoid dining with company. As I grew from boyhood to manhood I saw this would not do: and that to gain a place in men's esteem I must mix and bustle with them. Pride and an excitation of spirits supplied the real pleasure which others seem to feel in society, and certainly upon many occasions it was real. Still, if the question was, eternal company, without the power of retiring within yourself, or solitary confinement for life,

Sir Walter Scott

I should say, "Turnkey, lock the cell!" My life, though not without its fits of waking and strong exertion, has been a sort of dream, spent in

Chewing the cud of sweet and bitter fancy.

I have worn a wishing-cap, the power of which has been to divert present griefs by a touch of the wand of imagination, and gild over the future prospect by prospects more fair than can ever be realised. Somewhere it is said that this castle-building — this wielding of the aërial trowel — is fatal to exertions in actual life. I cannot tell; I have not found it so. I cannot, indeed, say like Madame Genlis, that in the imaginary scenes in which I have acted a part I ever prepared myself for anything which actually befell me; but I have certainly fashioned out much that made the present hour pass pleasantly away, and much that has enabled me to contribute to the amusement of the public. Since I was five years old I cannot remember the time when I had not some ideal part to play for my own solitary amusement.

FIDELITY IN OBSERVATION

[During the summer of 1812 Walter Scott paid a visit to Mr. John B. S. Morritt at Rokeby, visiting the castles of Bowes, Brough, Appleby, and Brougham. In Lockhart's "Life of Scott," Mr. Morritt is quoted:]

"I had, of course, had many previous opportunities of testing the almost conscientious

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

fidelity of his local descriptions; but I could not help being singularly struck with the lights which this visit threw on that characteristic of his compositions. The morning after he arrived he said, 'You have often given me materials for a romance — now I want a good robber's cave and an old church of the right sort.' We rode out, and he found what he wanted in the ancient slate-quarries of Brignal, and the ruined abbey of Eggleston; I observed him noting down even the peculiar little wild flowers and herbs that accidentally grew round and on the side of a bold crag near his intended cave of Guy Denzil; and could not help saying, that as he was not to be upon oath in his work, daisies, violets, and primroses would be as poetical as any of the humble plants he was examining. I laughed, in short, at his scrupulousness; but I understood him when he replied, 'that in nature herself no two scenes were exactly alike, and that whoever copied truly what was before his eyes, would possess the same variety in his descriptions, and exhibit apparently an imagination as boundless as the range of nature in the scenes he recorded, whereas, whoever trusted to imagination, would soon find his own mind circumscribed, and contracted to a few favourite images, and the repetition of these would, sooner or later, produce that very monotony and barrenness which had always haunted descriptive poetry in the hands of any but the patient worshippers of truth. Besides which,' he said,

Sir Walter Scott

‘local names and peculiarities make a fictitious story look so much better in the face.’ In fact, from his boyish habits, he was but half satisfied with the most beautiful scenery when he could not connect it with same local legend, and when I was forced sometimes to confess with the knife-grinder, ‘Story! God bless you! I have none to tell, sir’ — he would laugh and say, ‘then let us make one — nothing so easy as to make a tradition.’”

WROTE BEST EARLY IN THE MORNING

EDINBURGH, February 10, 1826 — The half hour between waking and rising has all my life proved propitious to any task which was exercising my invention. When I get over any knotty difficulty in a story, or have had in former times to fill up a passage in a poem, it was always when I first opened my eyes that the desired ideas thronged upon me. This is so much the case that I am in the habit of relying upon it, and saying to myself, when I am at a loss, “Never mind, we shall have it at seven o’clock to-morrow morning.” If I have forgot a circumstance, or a name, or a copy of verses, it is the same thing. I think the first hour of the morning is also favourable to the bodily strength. Among other feats, when I was a young man, I was able at times to lift a smith’s anvil with one hand, by what is called the horn, or projecting piece of iron on which things are beaten to turn them around. But I could only do this before

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

breakfast, and shortly after rising. It required my full strength, undiminished by the least exertion, and those who choose to try it will find the feat no easy one. This morning I had some good ideas respecting "Woodstock," which will make the story better. The devil of a difficulty is, that one puzzles the skein in order to excite curiosity, and then cannot disentangle it for the satisfaction of the prying fiend they have raised.

[How Scott employed his materials in the construction of a romance is told in his introduction to the "Fortunes of Nigel."]

MOODS IN COMPOSITION

June 4, 1826 — I wrote a good task yesterday, and to-day a great one, scarce stirring from the desk the whole day, except a few minutes when Lady Rae called. I was glad to see my wife's old friend, with whom in early life we had so many pleasant meetings. I am not sure it is right to work so hard; but a man must take himself, as well as other people, when he is in the humour. A man will do twice as much at one time and in half the time, and twice as well as he will be able to do at another. People are always crying out about method, and in some respects it is good, and shows to great advantage among men of business, but I doubt if men of method, who can lay aside or take up the pen just at the hour appointed, will ever be better than poor creatures. Lady L[ouise] S[tuart]

used to tell me of Mr. Hoole, the translator of "Tasso" and "Ariosto," and in that capacity a noble transmuter of gold into lead, that he was a clerk in the India House, with long ruffles and a snuff-coloured suit of clothes, who occasionally visited her father [John, Earl of Bute]. She sometimes conversed with him, and was amused to find that he did exactly so many couplets day by day, neither more or less; and habit had made it light to him, however heavy it might seem to the reader.

NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

[Hawthorne is the one supreme romancer that America has given to the world. Himself of Puritan blood he depicted with weird power and profound insight the conflict between Puritan passion and Puritan conscience. Underlying his faculty as a writer was strong common sense — matured in the school of adversity. Had fortune permitted, he would have been a recluse to the end of his days. Poverty obliged him to earn his bread in the Custom Houses of Boston and Salem, in the American Consulate at Liverpool. This compulsory taking part in every-day life did him good. It enlarged his knowledge of human nature: it gave a foil to the sombre broodings of his imagination.]

In 1876 his son-in-law, the late George P. Lathrop, wrote "A Study of Hawthorne," which has furnished two letters here transcribed. "Hawthorne and his Wife," by Julian Hawthorne, their son, has provided the other letters here presented, thanks to the courtesy of the publishers, Houghton, Mifflin & Co., Boston.

Some charming pages of autobiography, flecked here and there with an inevitable touch of romance, are given by Hawthorne in his prefaces to "Twice-told Tales," and "Mosses from an Old Manse." The introductory chapter of "The Scarlet Letter" describes the Salem Custom House in a vein of unwonted humour. This by-play but heightens the effect of a tragedy unfolded with a skill nothing less than magical. — Ed.]

[In 1853 Hawthorne gave Richard H. Stoddard a brief autobiographical sketch for the *National Review*:]

AS A BOY

I WAS born in the town of Salem, Massachusetts [July 4, 1804] in a house built by my grandfather, who was a maritime personage.

Nathaniel Hawthorne

The old household estate was in another part of the town, and had descended in the family ever since the settlement of the country; but this old man of the sea exchanged it for a lot of land situated near the wharves, and convenient to his business, where he built the house (which is still standing), and laid out a garden, where I rolled on a grass-plot under an apple-tree and picked abundant currants. This grandfather (about whom there is a ballad in Griswold's "Curiosities of American Literature") died long before I was born. One of the peculiarities of my boyhood was a grievous disinclination to go to school, and (Providence favouring me in this natural repugnance) I never did go half as much as other boys, partly owing to delicate health (which I made the most of for the purpose), and partly because, much of the time, there were no schools within reach.

When I was eight or nine years old, my mother, with her three children, took up her residence on the banks of the Sebago Lake, in Maine, where the family owned a large tract of land; and here I ran quite wild, and would, I doubt not, have willingly run wild till this time, fishing all day long, or shooting with an old fowling-piece; but reading a good deal, too, on the rainy days, especially in Shakspeare and "The Pilgrim's Progress," and any poetry or light books within my reach. Those were delightful days; for that part of the country was wild then, with only scattered clearings, and

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

nine-tenths of it primæval woods. But by and by my good mother began to think it was necessary for her boy to do something else; so I was sent back to Salem, where a private instructor fitted me for college. I was educated (as the phrase is) at Bowdoin College. I was an idle student, negligent of college rules and the Procrustean details of academic life, rather choosing to nurse my own fancies than to dig into Greek roots and be numbered among the learned Thebans.

A LITERARY RECLUSE

It was my fortune or misfortune, just as you please, to have some slender means of supporting myself; and so, on leaving college, in 1825, instead of immediately studying a profession, I sat myself down to consider what pursuit in life I was best fit for. My mother had now returned, and taken up her abode in her deceased father's house, a tall, ugly, old, grayish building (it is now the residence of half a dozen Irish families), in which I had a room. And year after year I kept on considering what I was fit for, and time and my destiny decided that I was to be the writer that I am. I had always a natural tendency (it appears to have been on the paternal side) toward seclusion; and this I now indulged to the utmost, so, that, for months together, I scarcely held human intercourse outside of my own family; seldom going out except at twilight, or only to take the nearest way to the most convenient solitude,

which was oftenest the seashore — the rocks and beaches in that vicinity being as fine as any in New England. Once a year, or thereabouts, I used to make an excursion of a few weeks, in which I enjoyed as much of life as other people do in the whole year's round. Having spent so much of my boyhood and youth away from my native place, I had very few acquaintances in Salem, and during the nine or ten years that I spent there, in this solitary way, I doubt whether so much as twenty people in the town were aware of my existence.

Meanwhile, strange as it may seem, I had lived a very tolerable life, always seemed cheerful, and enjoyed the very best bodily health. I had read endlessly all sorts of good and good-for-nothing books, and, in the dearth of other employment, had early begun to scribble sketches and stories, most of which I burned. Some, however, got into the magazines and annuals; but, being anonymous or under different signatures, they did not soon have the effect of concentrating any attention upon the author. Still, they did bring me into contact with certain individuals. Mr. S. C. Goodrich (a gentleman of many excellent qualities, although a publisher) took a very kindly interest in me, and employed my pen for "The Token," an annual. Old copies of "The Token" may still be found in antique boudoirs and on the dusty shelves of street bookstalls. It was the first and probably the best — it could not possibly be the worst

— annual ever issued in this country. It was a sort of hot-house, where native flowers were made to bloom like exotics.

“TWICE-TOLD TALES”

From the press of Munroe & Co., Boston, in the year 1837, appeared “Twice-Told Tales.” Though not widely successful in their day and generation, they had the effect of making me known in my own immediate vicinity; insomuch that, however reluctantly, I was compelled to come out of my owl’s nest and lionise in a small way. Thus I was gradually drawn somewhat into the world, and became pretty much like other people. My long seclusion had not made me melancholy or misanthropic, nor wholly unfitted me for the bustle of life; and perhaps it was the kind of discipline which my idiosyncrasy demanded, and chance and my own instincts, operating together, had caused me to do what was fittest.

CONCERNING COLLEGE AND A CAREER

[TO HIS MOTHER]

SALEM, March 13, 1821.

. . . I don’t read as much now as I did because I am more taken up in studying. I am quite reconciled to going to college, since I am to spend my vacations with you. Yet four years of the best part of my life is a great deal to throw away. I have not yet concluded what profession I shall have. The being a

minister is of course out of the question. I should not think that even you could desire me to choose so dull a way of life. Oh no, mother, I was not born to vegetate forever in one place, and to live and die as tranquil as — a puddle of water. As to lawyers, there are so many of them already that one half of them (upon a moderate calculation) are in a state of actual starvation. A physician, then, seems to be "Hobson's choice"; but yet I should not like to live by the diseases and infirmities of my fellow-creatures. And it would weigh very hardly on my conscience, in the course of my practice, if I should chance to send any unlucky patient *ad inferum*, which, being interpreted, is "to the realms below." Oh that I was rich enough to live without any profession! What do you think of my becoming an author, and relying for support upon my pen? Indeed, I think the illegibility of my hand is very author-like. How proud you would be to see my works praised by the reviewers, as equal to the proudest productions of the scribbling sons of John Bull. But authors are always poor devils, and therefore Satan may take them.

NOT AT ONE WITH NEW ENGLAND PRACTICALITIES

[In his "Sunday at Home," one of the "Twice-Told Tales," is this portrait of Hawthorne by himself:]

I was a youth of gay and happy temperament, with an incorrigible levity of spirit, of no vicious

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

propensities, sensible enough, but wayward and fanciful. What a character was this to be brought into contact with the old Pilgrim spirit of my guardian! We were at variance on a thousand points; but our chief and final dispute arose from the pertinacity with which he insisted on my adopting a particular profession: while I, being heir to a moderate competence, had avowed my purpose of keeping aloof from the regular business of life. This would have been a dangerous resolution anywhere in the world; it was fatal in New England. There is a grossness in the conceptions of my countrymen; they will not be convinced that any good thing may consist with what they call idleness; they can anticipate nothing but evil of a young man who neither studies physic, law, nor gospel, nor opens a store, nor takes to farming, but manifests an incomprehensible disposition to be satisfied with what his father left him. The principle is excellent in its general influence, but most miserable in its effect on the few who violate it. I had a quick sensitiveness to public opinion, and felt as if it ranked me with the tavern haunters and town-paupers — with the drunken poet who hawked his own Fourth of July Odes, and the broken soldier who had been good for nothing since last war. The consequence of all this was a piece of light-hearted desperation. I do not overestimate my notoriety when I take it for granted that many of my readers must have heard of me in

Nathaniel Hawthorne

the wild way of life which I adopted. The idea of becoming a wandering story teller had been suggested a year or two before, by an encounter with several merry vagabonds in a showman's wagon, where they and I had sheltered ourselves during a summer shower.

A RETROSPECT AT THIRTY-THREE

[TO HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW,
A COLLEGE MATE AT BOWDOIN]

June 2, 1837.

. . . It gratifies me that you have occasionally felt an interest in my situation; but your quotation from Jean Paul about the 'lark's nest' makes me smile. You would have been much nearer the truth if you had pictured me as dwelling in an owl's nest; for mine is about as dismal, and, like the owl, I seldom venture abroad till after dusk. By some witchcraft or other—for I really cannot assign any reasonable why and wherefore—I have been carried apart from the main current of life, and find it impossible to get back again. Since we last met, which you remember was in Sawtell's room, where you read a farewell poem to the relics of the class—ever since that time I have secluded myself from society; and yet I never meant any such thing, nor dreamed what sort of life I was going to lead. I have made a captive of myself, and put me into a dungeon,

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

and now I cannot find the key to let myself out — and if the door were open, I should be almost afraid to come out. You tell me that you have met with troubles and changes. I know not what these may have been, but I can assure you that trouble is the next best thing to enjoyment, and that there is no fate in this world so horrible as to have no share in its joys or sorrows. For the last ten years I have not lived, but only dreamed of living. It may be true that there have been some unsubstantial pleasures, here in the shade, which I might have missed in the sunshine, but you cannot conceive how utterly devoid of satisfaction all my retrospects are. I have laid up no treasure of pleasant remembrances against old age; but there is some comfort in thinking that future years can hardly fail to be more varied, and therefore more tolerable than the past.

You give me more credit than I deserve, in supposing that I have led a studious life. I have indeed turned over a good many books, but in so desultory a way that it cannot be called study, nor has it left me the fruits of study. As to my literary efforts, I do not think much of them, nor is it worth while to be ashamed of them. They would have been better, I trust, if written under more favourable circumstances. I have had no external excitement, — no consciousness that the public would like what I wrote, nor much hope nor a passionate desire that they should do so. Nevertheless, having noth-

ing else to be ambitious of, I have been considerably interested in literature; and if my writings had made any decided impression, I should have been stimulated to greater exertions; but there has been no warmth of approbation, so that I have always written with benumbed fingers. I have another great difficulty in the lack of material; for I have seen so little of the world that I have nothing but thin air to concoct my stories of, and it is not easy to give a life-like semblance to such shadowy stuff. Sometimes through a peep-hole I have caught a glimpse of the real world, and the two or three articles in which I have portrayed these glimpses please me better than the others. . . .

AT BROOK FARM

[Hawthorne joined the famous Brook Farm Community, at Roxbury, now incorporated with Boston. His experience there became the groundwork of chapters in "The Blithedale Romance." On May 3, 1841, he writes to his sister Louisa:]

Mr. Ripley summoned us into the cow-yard, and introduced me to an instrument with four prongs, commonly entitled a dung-fork. With this tool I have already assisted to load twenty or thirty carts of manure, and shall take part in loading three hundred more. Besides, I have planted potatoes and pease, cut straw and hay for the cattle, and done various other mighty works. This very morning I milked

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

three cows, and I milk two or three every night and morning. The weather has been so unfavourable that we have worked comparatively little in the fields; but, nevertheless, I have gained strength wonderfully — grown quite a giant, in fact — and can do a day's work without the slightest inconvenience. In short, I am transformed into a complete farmer.

This is one of the most beautiful places I ever saw in my life, and as secluded as if it were a hundred miles from any city or village. There are woods, in which we can ramble all day without meeting anybody or scarcely seeing a house. Our house stands apart from the main road, so that we are not troubled even with passengers looking at us. Once in a while we have a transcendental visitor, such as Mr. Alcott, but generally we pass whole days without seeing a single face save those of the brethren. The whole fraternity eat together; and such delectable way of life has never been seen on earth since the days of the early Christians.

The thin frock which you made for me is considered a most splendid article, and I should not wonder if it were to become the summer uniform of the community. I have a thick frock likewise; but it is rather deficient in grace though extremely warm and comfortable. I wear a tremendous pair of cow-hide boots, with soles two inches thick —

Nathaniel Hawthorne

of course, when I come to see you I shall wear my farmer's dress.

NATH. HAWTHORNE, *Ploughman*.

SYMPATHY BENEATH HIS RESERVE

[In a Note-book, April 8, 1843.]

A cloudy veil stretches over the abyss of my nature. I have, however, no love of secrecy and darkness. I am glad to think that God sees through my heart, and, if any angel has power to penetrate into it, he is welcome to know everything that is there. Yes, and so may any mortal who is capable of full sympathy, and therefore worthy to come into my depths. But he must find his own way there, I can neither guide nor enlighten him. It is this involuntary reserve, I suppose, that has given the objectivity to my writings; and when people think that I am pouring out myself in a tale or an essay, I am merely telling what is common to human nature, not what is peculiar to myself. I sympathise with them, not they with me.

A GIFT CONSIDERED AS A LOAN

[In 1849 the political enemies of Hawthorne caused him to lose his post as Surveyor at the Salem Custom House. His friends came to his aid with a handsome subscription, accompanied by this note from George S. Hillard.]

BOSTON, January 17, 1850.

It occurred to me, and some other of your friends that, in consideration of the events of the last year, you might at this time be in need of a little pecuniary aid. I have therefore

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

collected, from some of those who admire your genius and respect your character, the enclosed sum of money, which I send you with my warmest wishes for your health and happiness. I know the sensitive edge of your temperament; but do not speak or think of obligation. It is only paying, in a very imperfect measure, the debt we owe you for what you have done for American literature. Could you know the readiness with which every one to whom I applied contributed to this little offering, and could you have heard the warm expressions with which some accompanied their gift, you would have felt that the bread you had cast on the waters had indeed come back to you. Let no shadow of despondency, my dear friend, steal over you. Your friends do not and will not forget you. You shall be protected against "eating cares," which, I take it, mean cares lest we should not have enough to eat.

[Hawthorne replied:]

SALEM, January 30, 1850.

I read your letter in the vestibule of the Post Office; and it drew — what my troubles never have — the water to my eyes; so that I was glad of the sharply cold west wind that blew into them as I came homeward, and gave them an excuse for being red and bleared.

There was much that was very sweet — and something too that was very bitter — mingled with that same moisture. It is sweet to be

Nathaniel Hawthorne

remembered and cared for by one's friends — some of whom know me for what I am, while others, perhaps, know me only through a generous faith — sweet to think that they deem me worth upholding in my poor work through life. And it is bitter, nevertheless, to need their support. It is something else besides pride that teaches me that ill-success in life is really and justly a matter of shame. I am ashamed of it, and I ought to be. The fault of a failure is attributable — in a great degree at least — to the man who fails. I should apply this truth in judging of other men; and it behoves me not to shun its point or edge in taking it home to my own heart. Nobody has a right to live in the world unless he be strong and able, and applies his ability to good purpose.

The money, dear Hillard, will smooth my path for a long time to come. The only way in which a man can retain his self-respect, while availing himself of the generosity of his friends, is by making it an incitement to his utmost exertions, so that he may not need their help again. I shall look upon it so — nor will shun any drudgery that my hand shall find to do, if thereby I may win bread.

[Four years afterward, when American Consul at Liverpool, Hawthorne wrote:]

LIVERPOOL, December 9, 1853.

DEAR HILLARD:

I herewith send you a draft on Ticknor for the sum (with interest included) which was so

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

kindly given me by unknown friends, through you, about four years ago.

I have always hoped and intended to do this, from the first moment when I made up my mind to accept the money. It would not have been right to speak of this purpose before it was in my power to accomplish it; but it has never been out of my mind for a single day, nor hardly, I think, for a single working hour. I am most happy that this loan (as I may fairly call it, at this moment) can now be repaid without the risk on my part of leaving my wife and children utterly destitute. I should have done it sooner; but I felt that it would be selfish to purchase the great satisfaction for myself, at any fresh risk to them. We are not rich, nor are we ever likely to be; but the miserable pinch is over.

The friends who were so generous to me must not suppose that I have not felt deeply grateful, nor that my delight at relieving myself from this pecuniary obligation is of any ungracious kind. I have been grateful all along, and am more so now than ever. This act of kindness did me an unspeakable amount of good; for it came when I most needed to be assured that anybody thought it worth while to keep me from sinking. And it did me even greater good than this, in making me sensible of the need of sterner efforts than my former ones, in order to establish a right for myself to live and be comfortable. For it is my creed (and was so even at that wretched time) that a man has no claim upon

Nathaniel Hawthorne

his fellow-creatures, beyond bread and water and a grave, unless he can win it by his own strength or skill. But so much the kinder were those unknown friends whom I thank again with all my heart.

"THE SCARLET LETTER"

[Hawthorne finished "The Scarlet Letter" in Salem on February 3, 1850. He wrote James T. Fields, a partner in the firm of Ticknor & Co., Boston, his publishers:]

. . . If the book is made up entirely of "The Scarlet Letter," it will be too sombre. I found it impossible to relieve the shadows of the story with so much light as I would gladly have thrown in. Keeping so close to its point as the tale does, and diversified no otherwise than by turning different sides of the same dark idea to the reader's eye, it will weary very many people, and disgust some. Is it safe, then, to stake the book on this one chance?

[He wrote to his friend, Horatio Bridge:]

SALEM, February 4, 1850.

I finished my book only yesterday: one end being in the press in Boston, while the other was in my head here in Salem; so that, as you see, the story is at least fourteen miles long. . . .

My book, the publisher tells me, will not be out before April. He speaks of it in tremendous terms of approbation; so does Mrs. Hawthorne, to whom I read the conclusion last night. It broke her heart, and sent her to bed with a

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

grievous headache — which I look upon as a triumphant success. Judging from its effect on her and the publisher, I may calculate on what the bowlers call a “ten-strike.” But I do not make any such calculation.

“THE HOUSE OF THE SEVEN GABLES”

[TO HIS PUBLISHERS]

LENOX, October 1, 1850.

. . . I shan't have the new story ready by November, for I am never good for anything in the literary way till after the first autumnal frost, which has somewhat such an effect on my imagination that it does on the foliage here about me — multiplying and brightening its hues; though they are likely to be sober and shabby enough after all.

[A few weeks afterward:]

. . . I write diligently, but not so rapidly as I had hoped. I find the book requires more care and thought than “The Scarlet Letter,” also I have to wait oftener for a mood. “The Scarlet Letter” being all in one tone, I had only to get my pitch, and could then go on interminably. Many passages of this book ought to be finished with the minuteness of a Dutch picture, in order to give them their proper effect. Sometimes, when tired of it, it strikes me that the whole is an absurdity, from beginning to end; but the fact is, in writing a romance, a man is always, or always ought to be, careering

Nathaniel Hawthorne

on the utmost verge of a precipitous absurdity, and the skill lies in running as close as possible without actually tumbling over. My prevailing idea is that the book ought to succeed better than "The Scarlet Letter," though I have no idea that it will.

[On July 8, 1851, after the book had been fully criticised he wrote to Horatio Bridge:]

I think it a work more characteristic of my mind, and more proper and natural for me to write, than the "Scarlet Letter," but, for that very reason, less likely to interest the public. Nevertheless, it appears to have sold better than the former, and I think is more sure of retaining the ground that it acquires.

LIFE IN ENGLAND

[TO LONGFELLOW]

LIVERPOOL, August 30, 1854.

DEAR LONGFELLOW:

Our friend Henry Bright has handed me some autographs for you.

Why don't you come over?—being now a man of leisure, and with nothing to keep you in America. If I were in your position, I think that I should make my home on this side of the water—though always with an indefinite and never-to-be-executed intention to go back and die in my native land. America is a good land for young people, but not for those who are past their prime. It is impossible to grow

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

old comfortably there, for nothing keeps you in countenance. . . . Everything is so delightfully sluggish here! It is so pleasant to find people holding on to old ideas, and hardly now beginning to dream of matters that are already old with us. I have had enough of progress. Now I want to stand stock still, or rather to go back twenty years or so; and that is what I seem to have done in coming to England. Then, too, it is so agreeable to find one's self relieved from the tyranny of public opinion; or, at any rate, under the jurisdiction of quite a different public sentiment from what we have left behind us. A man of individuality and refinement can certainly live far more comfortably here — provided he has the means to live at all — than in New England. Be it owned, however, that I sometimes feel a tug at my very heartstrings when I think of my old home and friends. . . . Believe me most sincerely yours.

A RETROSPECT AT FIFTY

[In one of his English Note-books, Hawthorne wrote in Liverpool, on Christmas Day, 1854:]

I think I have been happier this Christmas than ever before — by my own fireside and with my wife and children about me — more content to enjoy what I have, less anxious for anything beyond it in this life. My early life was perhaps a good preparation for the declining half of life; it having been such a blank that any thereafter would compare favourably with it. For a

Nathaniel Hawthorne

long, long while I have occasionally been visited with a singular dream; and I have an impression that I have dreamed it ever since I have been in England. It is that I am still at college — or, sometimes even at school — and there is a sense that I have been there unconscionably long, and have quite failed to make such progress as my contemporaries have done; and I seem to meet some of them with a feeling of shame and depression that broods over me as I think of it, even when awake. This dream, recurring through all these twenty or thirty years, must be one of the effects of that heavy seclusion in which I shut myself up for twelve years after leaving college, when everybody moved on and left me behind. How strange that it should come now when I may call myself famous and prosperous! — when I am happy, too!

HAWTHORNE AS A LOVER

[On July 9, 1842, Hawthorne was married to Sophia Amelia, daughter of Dr. Nathaniel Peabody of Boston. Hawthorne's was a perfect marriage. His love-letters reveal how large, warm and constant a heart throbbed beneath his frigid exterior.]

May 26, 1839.

. . . It is very singular (but I do not suppose I can express it) that, while I love you so dearly, and while I am so conscious of the deep union of our spirits, still I have an awe of you that I never felt for anybody else. Awe is not the word, either, because it might imply

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

something stern in you; whereas — but you must make it out for yourself. I do wish I could put this into words — not so much for your satisfaction (because I believe you will understand) as for my own. I suppose I should have pretty much the same feeling if an angel were to come from heaven and be my dearest friend — only the angel could not have the tenderest of human natures too, the sense of which is mingled with this sentiment. Perhaps it is because, in meeting you, I really meet a spirit, whereas the obstructions of earth have prevented such a meeting in every other case. But I leave the mystery here. Some time or other it may be made plainer to me. But methinks it converts my love into religion. And then it is singular, too, that this awe (or whatever it be) does not prevent me from feeling that it is I who have the charge of you. And will not you rebel? Oh, no; because I possess the power to guide only so far as I love you. My love gives me the right, and your love consents to it.

Since writing the above, I have been asleep; and I dreamed that I had been sleeping a whole year in the open air, and that while I slept, the grass grew around me. It seemed, in my dream, that the bedclothes were spread beneath me; and when I awoke (in my dream) I snatched them up, and the earth under them looked black, as if it had been burnt — a square place, exactly the size of the bedclothes. Yet there were grass and herbage scattered over

this burnt space, looking as fresh and bright and dewy as if the summer rain and the summer sun had been cherishing them all the time. Interpret this for me; but do not draw any sombre omens from it. What is signified by my nap of a whole year (it made me grieve to think that I had lost so much of eternity)? — and what was the fire that blasted the spot of earth which I occupied, while the grass flourished all around? — and what comfort am I to draw from the fresh herbage amid the burnt space? But it is a silly dream, and you cannot expound any sense out of it.

June 22, 1840.

Belovedest, what a letter! Never was so much beauty poured out of any heart before; and to read it over and over is like bathing my brow in a fresh fountain, and drinking draughts that renew the life within me. Nature is kind and motherly to you, and takes you into her inmost heart and cherishes you there, because you look on her with holy and loving eyes. How can you say that I have ever written anything beautiful, being yourself so potent to reproduce whatever is loveliest? If I did not know that you loved me, I should even be ashamed before you. Worthy of you I am not; but you will make me so, for there will be time or eternity enough for your blessed influence to work on me. Would that we could build our cottage this very summer, amid these scenes of Concord which you describe. My heart

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

thirsts and languishes to be there, away from the hot sun, and the coal-dust, and the steaming docks, and the thick-pated, stubborn, contentious men, with whom I brawl from morning till night, and all the weary toil that quite engrosses me, and yet occupies only a small part of my being, which I did not know existed before I became a measurer, (at the Custom House). I do think I should sink down quite disheartened and inanimate if you were not happy, and gathering from earth and sky enjoyment for both of us; but this makes me feel that my real, innermost soul is apart from all these unlovely circumstances, and that it has not ceased to exist, as I might sometimes suspect, but is nourished and kept alive through you. You know not what comfort I have in thinking of you amid those beautiful scenes and amid those sympathising hearts. If you are well and happy, if your step is light and joyous there, and your cheek is becoming rosier, and if your heart makes pleasant music, then is it not better for you to stay there a little longer? And if better for you, is it not so for me likewise? Now, I do not press you to stay, but leave it all to your wisdom; and if you feel it is now time to come home, then let it be so.

HAWTHORNE AS A HUSBAND

[From his Journal, June, 1843.]

. . . Having made up my bunch of flowers, I return home with them to my wife,

of whom what is loveliest among them are to me the imperfect emblems. My imagination twines her and the flowers into one wreath; and when I offer them to her, it seems as if I were introducing her to beings that have somewhat of her own nature in them. "My lily, here are your sisters ; cherish them!"— this is what my fancy says, while my heart smiles, and rejoices at the conceit. Then my dearest wife rejoices in the flowers, and hastens to give them water, and arranges them so beautifully that they are glad to have been gathered, from the muddy bottom of the river, and its wet, tangled margin — from among plants of evil smell and uncouth aspect, where the slimy eel and the frog and the black mud-turtle hide themselves, — glad of being rescued from this unworthy life, and made the ornaments of our parlour. What more could the loveliest of flowers desire? It is its earthly triumph, which it will remember with joy when it blooms in the paradise of flowers. . . . The chief event of the afternoon, and the happiest one of the day, is our walk. She must describe these walks; for where she and I have enjoyed anything together, I always deem my pen unworthy and inadequate to record it.

My wife is, in the strictest sense, my sole companion, and I need no other; there is no vacancy in my mind, any more than in my heart. In truth, I have spent so many years in total seclusion from all human society, that it is no wonder

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

if now I feel all my desires satisfied by this sole intercourse. But she has come to me from the midst of many friends and a large circle of acquaintance; yet she lives from day to day in this solitude, seeing nobody but myself and our Molly, while the snow of our avenue is untrodden for weeks by any footstep save mine; yet she is always cheerful. Thank God that I suffice for her boundless heart!

. . . Dear little wife, after finishing my record in the journal, I sat a long time in grandmother's chair, thinking of many things; but the thought of thee, the great thought of thee, was among all other thoughts, like the pervading sunshine falling through the boughs and branches of a tree and tingeing every separate leaf. And surely thou shouldst not have deserted me without manufacturing a sufficient quantity of sunshine to last till thy return. Art thou not ashamed?

Methinks my little wife is twin-sister to the Spring; so they should greet one another tenderly—for they both are fresh and dewy, both full of hope and cheerfulness; both have bird-voices, always singing out of their hearts; both are sometimes overcast with flitting mists, which only make the flowers bloom brighter; and both have power to renew and re-create the weary spirit, I have married the Spring! I am husband to the month of May!

CHARLES DICKENS

[Throughout the English-speaking world, Dickens maintains great popularity. This he owes to his abounding vitality, his prodigal invention, his fun, his humanity. Forster tells us in his *Life* that Dickens was a capital actor. His readers can well believe it. With a slight turn of fortune's wheel he would have been a great playwright, too. As he wrote his novels he seemed to have the stage always before him, never losing sight of the means by which its effects are produced and heightened. Hence he passed, all too easily, from the dramatic to the theatrical, from sentiment to sentimentality, from portraiture to burlesque. He paints a Cheeryble, a Heep, a Pecksniff, in a single hue. These surely are not men but personified virtues or vices, recalling the Great Heart, the Mr. Facing-both-ways, the Mr. Ready-to-halt of John Bunyan.]

The novels of Dickens, "*David Copperfield*" in particular, are largely written out of his own sufferings, struggles, and victories. His hardships as a child left a stamp of pain which he never outgrew. His limitations in training and discipline narrowed his field as a writer, but gave him a master-key to the hearts and minds of men and women born, like himself, to poverty and affliction. — Ed.]

HARDSHIPS AS A BOY

[John Forster, the life-long friend and biographer of Dickens, gives in his *Life* the fragment of an autobiography by Dickens, here presented in its main paragraphs. They show how much the great novelist learned human nature in the school of misery as a child.]

When Dickens was a boy of ten years of age, an inmate of his father's household was James Lamert. A kinsman George Lamert, had furnished capital to Josiah Warren for the establishment of a blacking factory in London, at 30 Hungerford Stairs, near the Strand. Dickens says:]

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

IN AN evil hour for me, as I often bitterly thought, its chief manager, James Lamert, who had lived with us in Bayham Street, seeing how I was employed from day to day, and knowing what our domestic circumstances then were, proposed that I should go into the blacking warehouse, to be as useful as I could, at a salary, I think, of six shillings a week. I am not clear whether it was six or seven. I am inclined to believe, from my uncertainty on this head, that it was six at first, and seven afterward. At any rate the offer was accepted very willingly by my father and mother, and on a Monday morning I went down to the blacking warehouse to begin my business life.

It is wonderful to me how I could have been so easily cast away at such an age. It is wonderful to me, that, even after my descent into the poor little drudge I had been since we came to London, no one had compassion enough on me — a child of singular abilities, quick, eager, delicate, and soon hurt, bodily or mentally — to suggest that something might have been spared, as certainly it might have been, to place me at any common school. Our friends, I take it, were tired out. No one made any sign. My father and mother were quite satisfied. They could hardly have been more so, if I had been twenty years of age, distinguished at a grammar school, and going to Cambridge.

Our relative had kindly arranged to teach me something in the dinner-hour, from twelve

to one, I think it was, every day. But an arrangement so incompatible with counting-house business soon died away, from no fault of his or mine; and for the same reason, my small work-table, and my grosses of pots, my papers, string, scissors, paste-pot, and labels, by little and little, vanished out of the recess in the counting-house, and kept company with the other small work-tables, grosses of pots, papers, string, scissors, and paste-pots, downstairs. It was not long before Bob Fagin and I, and another boy whose name was Paul Green, but who was currently believed to have been christened Poll (a belief which I transferred, long afterward again, to Mr. Sweedlepipe, in "Martin Chuzzlewit"), worked generally side by side. Bob Fagin was an orphan, and lived with his brother-in-law, a waterman. Poll Green's father had the additional distinction of being a fireman, and was employed at Drury Lane theatre; where another relation of Poll's, I think his little sister, did imps in the pantomimes.

No words can express the secret agony of my soul as I sunk into this companionship; compared these every day associates with those of my happier childhood; and felt my early hopes of growing up to be a learned and distinguished man, crushed in my breast. The deep remembrance of the sense I had of being utterly neglected and hopeless; of the shame I felt in my position; of the misery it was to my young heart to believe that, day by day, what I

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

had learned, and thought, and delighted in, and raised my fancy and my emulation up by, was passing away from me, never to be brought back any more, cannot be written. My whole nature was so penetrated with the grief and humiliation of such considerations that even now, famous and caressed and happy, I often forget in my dreams that I have a dear wife and children; even that I am a man; and wander desolately back to that time of my life.

I know I do not exaggerate, unconsciously and unintentionally, the scantiness of my resources and the difficulties of my life. I know that if a shilling or so were given me by any one, I spent it in a dinner or a tea. I know that I worked, from morning to night, with common men and boys, a shabby child. I know that I tried, but ineffectually, not to anticipate my money, and to make it last the week through; by putting it away in a drawer I had in the counting-house, wrapped into six little parcels, each parcel containing the same amount, and labelled with a different day. I know that I have lounged about the streets, insufficiently and unsatisfactorily fed. I know that, but for the mercy of God, I might easily have been, for any care that was taken of me, a little robber or a little vagabond.

A LITTLE GENTLEMAN

But I held some station at the blacking warehouse too. Besides that my relative at the

counting-house did what a man so occupied, and dealing with a thing so anomalous, could, to treat me as one upon a different footing from the rest, I never said, to man or boy, how it was that I came to be there, or gave the least indication of being sorry that I was there. That I suffered in secret, and that I suffered exquisitely, no one ever knew but I. How much I suffered, it is, as I have said already, utterly beyond my power to tell. No man's imagination can overstep the reality. But I kept my own counsel, and I did my work. I knew from the first, that if I could not do my work as well as any of the rest, I could not hold myself above slight and contempt. I soon became at least as expeditious and as skilful with my hands, as either of the other boys. Though perfectly familiar with them, my conduct and manners were different enough from theirs to place a space between us. They and the men always spoke of me as "the young gentleman." A certain man (a soldier once) named Thomas, who was the foreman, and another man Harry, who was the carman, and wore a red jacket, used to call me "Charles" sometimes in speaking to me; but I think it was mostly when we were very confidential, and when I had made some efforts to entertain them over our work with the results of some of the old readings, which were fast perishing out of my mind. Poll Green uprose once, and rebelled against the "young gentleman" usage; but Bob Fagin settled him speedily.

My rescue from this kind of existence I considered quite hopeless, and abandoned as such, altogether; though I am solemnly convinced that I never, for one hour, was reconciled to it, or was otherwise than miserably unhappy. I felt keenly, however, the being so cut off from my parents, my brothers, and sisters; and, when my day's work was done, going home to such a miserable blank. And *that*, I thought, might be corrected. One Sunday night I remonstrated with my father on this head, so pathetically and with so many tears, that his kind nature gave way. He began to think that it was not quite right. I do believe he had never thought so before, or thought about it. It was the first remonstrance I had ever made about my lot, and perhaps it opened up a little more than I intended. A back-attic was found for me at the house of an insolvent court agent, who lived in Lant Street in the Borough, where Bob Sawyer lodged many years afterward. A bed and bedding were sent over for me, and made up on the floor. The little window had a pleasant prospect of a timber-yard; and when I took possession of my new abode, I thought it was a paradise.

A FRIEND IN NEED

Bob Fagin was very good to me on the occasion of a bad attack of my old disorder, cramps. I suffered such excruciating pain that time, that they made a temporary bed of straw in my old recess in the counting-house, and I rolled about

on the floor, and Bob filled empty blacking-bottles with hot water, and applied relays of them to my side, half the day. I got better, and quite easy toward evening; but Bob (who was much bigger and older than I) did not like the idea of my going home alone, and took me under his protection. I was too proud to let him know about the prison; and after making several efforts to get rid of him, to all of which Bob Fagin, in his goodness, was deaf, shook hands with him on the steps of a house near Southwark Bridge on the Surrey side, making believe that I lived there. As a finishing piece of reality in case of his looking back, I knocked at the door, I recollect, and asked, when the woman opened it, if that was Mr. Robert Fagin's house.

My usual way home was over Blackfriars Bridge, and down that turning in the Blackfriars Road which has Rowland Hill's chapel on one side, and the likeness of a golden dog licking a golden pot over a shop door on the other. There are a good many little low-browed old shops in that street, of a wretched kind; and some are unchanged now. I looked into one a few weeks ago, where I used to buy bootlaces on Saturday nights and saw the corner where I once sat down on a stool to have a pair of ready-made half-boots fitted on. I have been seduced more than once, in that street on a Saturday night, by a show-van at a corner; and have gone in, with a very motley assemblage, to see the Fat Pig, the Wild Indian, and the Little

Lady. There were two or three hat manufactories there, then (I think they are there still); and among the things which, encountered anywhere, or under any circumstances, will instantly recall that time, is the smell of hat-making.

I was such a little fellow, with my poor white hat, little jacket, and corduroy trousers, that frequently, when I went into the bar of a strange public-house for a glass of ale or porter to wash down the saveloy and the loaf I had eaten in the street, they did n't like to give it me. I remember, one evening (I had been somewhere for my father, and was going back to the Borough over Westminster Bridge), that I went into a public-house in Parliament Street, which is still there though altered, at the corner of the short street leading into Cannon Row, and said to the landlord behind the bar, "What is your very best — the *VERY best* — ale, a glass?" For, the occasion was a festive one, for some reason: I forget why. It may have been my birthday, or somebody else's. "Twopence," says he. "Then," says I, "just draw me a glass of that, if you please, with a good head to it." The landlord looked at me, in return, over the bar, from head to foot, with a strange smile on his face; and instead of drawing the beer, looked round the screen and said something to his wife, who came out from behind it, with her work in her hand, and joined him in surveying me. Here we stand, all three, before me now, in my study in Devonshire Terrace. The land-

lord in his shirt-sleeves, leaning against the bar window-frame; his wife looking over the little half-door; and I, in some confusion, looking up at them from outside the partition. They asked me a good many questions, as what my name was, how old I was, where I lived, how I was employed, etc., etc. To all of which, that I might commit nobody, I invented appropriate answers. They served me with the ale, though I suspect it was not the strongest on the premises; and the landlord's wife, opening the little half-door and bending down, gave me a kiss that was half-admiring and half-compassionate, but all womanly and good, I am sure.

DELIVERANCE AT LAST

At last, one day, my father, and the relative so often mentioned, quarreled; quarreled by letter, for I took the letter from my father to him which caused the explosion, but quarreled very fiercely. It was about me. It may have had some backward reference, in part, for anything I know, to my employment at the window. All I am certain of is, that, soon after I had given him the letter, my cousin (he was a sort of cousin by marriage) told me he was very much insulted about me; and that it was impossible to keep me, after that. I cried very much, partly because it was so sudden, and partly because in his anger he was violent about my father, though gentle to me. Thomas, the old soldier, comforted me, and said he was

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

sure it was for the best. With a relief so strange that it was like oppression, I went home.

My mother set herself to accommodate the quarrel, and did so next day. She brought home a request for me to return next morning, and a high character of me, which I am very sure I deserved. My father said I should go back no more, and should go to school. I do not write resentfully or angrily: for I know how all these things have worked together to make me what I am; but I never afterward forgot, I never shall forget, I never can forget, that my mother was warm for my being sent back.

From that hour until this at which I write no word of that part of my childhood which I have now gladly brought to a close, has passed my lips to any human being. I have no idea how long it lasted; whether for a year, or much more, or less. From that hour, until this, my father and my mother have been stricken dumb upon it. I have never heard the least allusion to it, however far off and remote, from either of them. I have never, until I now impart it to this paper, in any burst of confidence with any one, my own wife not excepted, raised the curtain I then dropped, thank God.

HIS METHODS DEFENDED

[To a critic who said that Dickens overdid his descriptions, he replied:]

. . . It does not seem to me to be enough to say of any description that it is the exact

truth. The exact truth must be there; but the merit or art in the narrator, is the manner of stating the truth. As to which thing in literature, it always seems to me that there is a world to be done. And in these times, when the tendency is to be frightfully literal and catalogue-like — to make the thing, in short, a sort of sum in reduction that any miserable creature can do in that way — I have an idea (really founded on the love of what I profess), that the very holding of popular literature through a kind of popular dark age, may depend on such fanciful treatment. . . .

PENALTIES OF AUTHORSHIP

[TO MRS. WINTER, A VERY DEAR FRIEND AND
COMPANION IN HIS YOUTH]

Tuesday, April 3, 1855.

MY DEAR MARIA:

A necessity is upon me now — as at most times — of wandering about in my old wild way, to think. I could no more resist this on Sunday or yesterday than a man can dispense with food, or a horse can help himself from being driven. I hold my inventive capacity on the stern condition that it must master my whole life, often have complete possession of me, make its own demands upon me, and sometimes, for months together, put everything else away from me. If I had not known long ago that my place could never be held, unless I were at any moment ready to devote myself to it entirely,

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

I should have dropped out of it very soon. All this I can hardly expect you to understand — or the restlessness and waywardness of an author's mind. You have never seen it before you, or lived with it, or had occasion to think or care about it, and you cannot have the necessary consideration for it. "It is only half-an-hour." "It is only an afternoon." "It is only an evening," people say to me over and over again; but they don't know that it is impossible to command one's self sometimes to any stipulated and set disposal of five minutes, or that the mere consciousness of an engagement will sometimes worry a whole day. These are the penalties paid for writing books. Whoever is devoted to an art must be content to deliver himself wholly up to it, and to find his recompense in it. I am grieved if you suspect me of not wanting to see you, but I can't help it; I must go my way whether or no. Ever affectionately.

A SKETCH OF HIMSELF

[TO W. WILKIE COLLINS]

[It omits details given to Forster.]

TAVISTOCK HOUSE, June 6, 1856.

I have never seen anything about myself in print which has much correctness in it — any biographical account of myself I mean. I do not supply such particulars when I am asked for them by editors and compilers, simply because I am asked for them every day. If you want to prime Forgues, you may tell him without

fear of anything wrong, that I was born at Portsmouth on the 7th of February, 1812; that my father was in the Navy Pay Office; that I was taken by him to Chatham when I was very young, and lived and was educated there till I was twelve or thirteen, I suppose; that I was then put to a school near London, where (as at other places) I distinguished myself like a brick; that I was put in the office of a solicitor, a friend of my father's, and did n't much like it; and after a couple of years (as well as I can remember) applied myself with a celestial or diabolical energy to the study of such things as would qualify me to be a first rate parliamentary reporter — at that time a calling pursued by many clever men who were young at the Bar; that I made my début in the gallery (at about eighteen, I suppose), engaged on a voluminous publication no longer in existence, called the *Mirror of Parliament*; that when the *Morning Chronicle* was purchased by Sir John Easthope and acquired a large circulation, I was engaged there, and that I remained there until I had begun to publish "Pickwick," when I found myself in a condition to relinquish that part of my labours; that I left the reputation behind me of being the best and most rapid reporter ever known, and that I could do anything in that way under any sort of circumstances, and often did. (I daresay I am at this present writing the best shorthand writer in the world.)

That I began, without any interest or intro-

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

duction of any kind, to write fugitive pieces for the old *Monthly Magazine*, when I was in the gallery for the *Mirror of Parliament*; that my faculty for descriptive writing was seized upon the moment I joined the *Morning Chronicle*, and that I was liberally paid there and handsomely acknowledged, and wrote the greater part of the short descriptive "Sketches by Boz" in that paper; that I had been a writer when I was a mere baby, and always an actor from the same age; that I married the daughter of a writer to the signet in Edinburgh, who was the great friend and assistant of Scott, and who first made Lockhart known to him.

And that here I am.

Finally, if you want any dates of publication of books, tell Wills and he'll get them for you.

This is the first time I ever set down even these particulars, and, glancing them over, I feel like a wild beast in a caravan describing himself in the keeper's absence. Ever faithfully.

CRITICISM AS EDITOR

[Dickens was editor of "Household Words," and afterward of "All the Year Round." His friend, Frank Stone, an artist, had sent him "Notes of Travel," by a lady. Dickens's comments show his sound sense as an editor, his warmth of heart as a man:]

OFFICE OF HOUSEHOLD WORDS,
Monday, June 1, 1857.

MY DEAR STONE:

I know that what I am going to say will not be agreeable; but I rely on the auth-

oress's good sense; and say it knowing it to be the truth.

These "Notes" are destroyed by too much smartness. It gives the appearance of perpetual effort, stabs to the heart the nature that is in them, and wearies by the manner and not by the matter. It is the commonest fault in the world (as I have constant occasion to observe here), but it is a very great one. Just as you could n't bear to have an *épergne* or a candlestick on your table, supported by a light figure always on tiptoe and evidently in an impossible attitude for the sustainment of its weight, so all readers would be more or less oppressed and worried by this presentation of everything in one smart point of view, when they know it must have other, and weightier, and more solid properties. Airiness and good spirits are always delightful, and are inseparable from notes of a cheerful trip; but they should sympathise with many things as well as see them in a lively way. It is but a word or a touch that expresses this humanity, but without that little embellishment of good nature there is no such thing as humour. In this little MS. everything is too much patronised and condescended to, whereas the slightest touch of feeling for the rustic who is of the earth earthy, or of sisterhood with the homely servant who has made her face shine in her desire to please, would make a difference that the writer can scarcely imagine without trying it. The only relief in the twenty-one slips is the little

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

bit about the chimes. It *is* a relief, simply because it is an indication of some kind of sentiment. You don't want any sentiment laboriously made out in such a thing. You don't want any maudlin show of it. But you do want a pervading suggestion that it is there. It makes all the difference between being playful and being cruel. Again I must say, above all things — especially to young people writing: For the love of God don't condescend! Don't assume the attitude of saying, "See how clever I am, and what fun everybody else is!" Take any shape but that.

I observe an excellent quality of observation throughout, and think the boy at the shop, and all about him particularly good. I have no doubt whatever that the rest of the journal will be much better if the writer chooses to make it so. If she considers for a moment within herself, she will know that she derived pleasure from everything she saw, because she saw it with innumerable lights and shades upon it, and bound to humanity by innumerable fine links; she cannot possibly communicate anything of that pleasure to another by showing it from one little limited point only, and that point, observe, the one from which it is impossible to detach the exponent as the patroness of a whole universe of inferior souls. This is what everybody would mean in objecting to these notes (supposing them to be published), that they are too smart and too flippant.

As I understand this matter to be altogether between us three, and as I think your confidence, and hers, imposes a duty of friendship on me, I discharge it to the best of my ability. Perhaps I make more of it than you may have meant or expected; if so, it is because I am interested and wish to express it. If there had been anything in my objection not perfectly easy of removal, I might, after all, have hesitated to state it; but that is not the case. A very little indeed would make all this gaiety as sound and wholesome and good-natured in the reader's mind as it is in the writer's. Affectionately always.

BEGGARS ALL!

[To Henry Yates, the novelist, he sent this whimsical complaint:]

TAVISTOCK HOUSE, TAVISTOCK SQUARE,
LONDON, Wednesday, April 28th, 1858.

MY DEAR YATES:

For a good many years I have suffered a great deal from charities, but never anything like what I suffer now. The amount of correspondence they inflict upon me is really incredible. But this is nothing. Benevolent men get behind the piers of the gates, lying in wait for my going out; and when I peep shrinkingly from my study-windows, I see their pot-bellied shadows projected on the gravel. Benevolent bullies drive up in hansom cabs (with engraved portraits of their benevolent institutions hanging

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

over the aprons, like banners on their outward walls), and stay long at the door. Benevolent area-sneaks get lost in the kitchens and are found to impede the circulation of the knife-cleaning machine. My man has been heard to say (at the Burton Arms) "that if it was a wicious place, well and good — *that* an't door work; but that wen all the Christian wirtues is always a-shoulderin' and a-helberin' on you in the 'all, a-tryin' to git past you and cut upstairs into master's room, why no wages as you could n't name would n't make it up to you." Persecuted ever.

TOIL AS AN AUTHOR

[In 1859 *All the Year Round* was established with Dickens as its editor. While "The Tale of Two Cities" was passing through the compositors' hands, Dickens wrote:]

[TO JOHN FORSTER]

GAD'S HILL, August 25, 1859.

. . . To come to myself. I have written and begged the *All the Year Round* publisher to send you directly four weeks' proofs beyond the current number, that are in type. I hope you will like them. Nothing but the interest of the subject, and the pleasure of striving with the difficulty of the forms of treatment, nothing in the mere way of money, I mean, could also repay the time and trouble of the incessant condensation. But I set myself the little task of making a *picturesque* story, rising in every chapter with characters true to nature, but whom the story itself should express, more

than they should express themselves, by dialogue. I mean, in other words, that I fancied a story of incident might be written, in place of the bestiality that is written under that pretence, pounding the characters out in its own mortar, and beating their own interests out of them. If you could have read the story all at once, I hope you would n't have stopped halfway.

A FATHERLY WORD ON TAKING PAINS

[TO HIS SIXTH SON, HENRY FIELDING DICKENS,
BORN IN 1849]

BALTIMORE, U. S.,
Tuesday, February 11, 1868.

MY DEAR HARRY:

I should have written to you before now but for constant and arduous occupation. . . .

I am very glad to hear of the success of your reading, and still more glad that you went at it in downright earnest. I should never have made my success in life if I had been shy of taking pains, or if I had not bestowed upon the least thing I have ever undertaken exactly the same attention and care that I have bestowed upon the greatest. Do everything at your best. It was but this last year that I set to and learned every word of my readings; and from ten years ago to last night, I have never read to an audience but I have watched for an opportunity of striking out something better somewhere. Look at such of my manuscripts as are in the

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

library at Gad's, and think of the patient hours devoted year after year to single lines. . . .

Ever, my dear Harry, your affectionate Father.

ADVICE TO A SON LEAVING HOME

[Dickens's last child, Edward Bulwer Lytton Dickens, was born in 1852. At sixteen he went to Australia, with this parting word from his father:]

MY DEAREST PLORN:

I write this note to-day because your going away is much upon my mind, and because I want you to have a few parting words from me to think of now and then at quiet times. I need not tell you that I love you dearly, and am very, very sorry in my heart to part with you. But this life is half made up of partings, and these pains must be borne. It is my comfort and my sincere conviction that you are going to try the life for which you are best fitted. I think its freedom and wildness more suited to you than any experiment in a study or office would ever have been; and without that training, you could have followed no other suitable occupation.

What you have already wanted until now has been a set, steady, constant purpose. I therefore exhort you to persevere in a thorough determination to do whatever you have to do as well as you can do it. I was not so old as you are now when I first had to win my food, and do this out of this determination, and I have never slackened in it since.

Never take a mean advantage of any one in any transaction, and never be hard upon people who are in your power. Try to do to others as you would have them do to you, and do not be discouraged if they fail sometimes. It is much better for you that they should fail in obeying the greatest rule laid down by our Saviour than that you should. I put a New Testament among your books for the very same reasons, and with the very same hopes, that made me write an easy account of it for you, when you were a little child. Because it is the best book that ever was, or will be, known in the world; and because it teaches you the best lessons by which any human creature, who tries to be truthful and faithful to duty, can possibly be guided. As your brothers have gone away, one by one, I have written to each such words as I am now writing to you, and have entreated them all to guide themselves by this Book, putting aside the interpretations and inventions of man. You will remember that you have never at home been harassed about religious observances, or mere formalities. I have always been anxious not to weary my children with such things, before they are old enough to form opinions respecting them. You will therefore understand the better that I now most solemnly impress upon you the truth and beauty of the Christian Religion, as it came from Christ Himself, and the impossibility of your going far wrong if you humbly but heartily respect it. Only one thing

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

more on this head. The more we are in earnest as to feeling it, the less we are disposed to hold forth about it. Never abandon the wholesome practice of saying your own private prayers, night and morning. I have never abandoned it myself, and I know the comfort of it. I hope you will always be able to say in after life, that you had a kind father. You cannot show your affection for him so well, or make him so happy, as by doing your duty.

CHARLOTTE BRONTË

[The authoress of "Jane Eyre," "Shirley," and "Villette" was born in 1821 and died in 1855. She was the daughter of a clergyman, whose clerical visitors form part of her wonderful portrait gallery. Her experience as a governess in Brussels gave her the ground-work for "Villette," which many readers deem her best novel.

From the "List of Books," published by the American Library Association, Boston, is taken this note:

"Charlotte Brontë is one of the most striking personalities in English fiction; her novels are wholly an expression of that personality. Her actual experience was very limited, and of a kind that distorted an impetuous and fiery spirit. She poured her soul out in her books with painful bitterness and tremendous passion. She broke up the literary convention which represented women as tame, passionless beings, and showed them conscious of an independent existence, hopelessly battling against circumstances. The modern reader is most surprised by the submissive attitude toward men assumed to be the correct one, by the almost ridiculous qualities ascribed to men, and believed by the author to be natural and admirable, and by the readiness of her real, thinking, feeling women to fall madly in love with these imaginary gods. Nevertheless, her purely subjective novels have all the excitement of those dependent on thrilling plot and incident. In delineating the manners of people of whom she had no actual knowledge (her heroes included), her inexperience is evident; her style is direct and keen, but too poignant for modern taste. Her books are simply the cry of a soul for something that life refused, and will probably be read as long as humanity is capable of the sensation of passionate pity."

From Mrs. Gaskell's "Life of Charlotte Brontë" are drawn the following pages. — ED.]

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

LONELINESS IN BRUSSELS

[To ——]

October 13, 1843.

. . . I get on here after a fashion; but now that Mary D. has left Brussels, I have nobody to speak to, for I count the Belgians as nothing. Sometimes I ask myself how long shall I stay here; but as yet I have only asked the question, I have not answered it. However, when I have acquired as much German as I think fit, I think I shall pack up bag and baggage, and depart. Twinges of home-sickness cut me to the heart, every now and then. To-day the weather is glaring, and I am stupefied with a bad cold and headache. I have nothing to tell you. One day is like another in this place. I know you, living in the country, can hardly believe it is possible life can be monotonous in the centre of a brilliant capital like Brussels; but so it is. I feel it most on holidays, when all the girls and teachers go out to visit, and it sometimes happens that I am left, during several hours, quite alone, with four great desolate school-rooms at my disposition. I try to read, I try to write; but in vain. I then wander about from room to room, but the silence and loneliness of all the house weighs down one's spirits like lead. You will hardly believe that Madame Heger [in whose school Miss Brontë was a teacher] (good and kind as I have described her) never comes near me on these occasions. I own,

Charlotte Brontë

I was astonished the first time I was left alone thus; when everybody else was enjoying the pleasures of a fête day with their friends, and she knew I was quite by myself, and never took the least notice of me. Yet, I understand, she praises me very much to everybody, and says what excellent lessons I give. She is not colder to me than she is to the other teachers; but they are less dependent on her than I am. They have relations and acquaintances in Brussels. You remember the letter she wrote me, when I was in England? How kind and affectionate that was! is it not odd? In the meantime, the complaints I make at present are a sort of relief which I permit myself. In all other respects I am well satisfied with my position, and you may say so to people who inquire after me (if any one does). Write to me, dear, whenever you can. You do a good deal when you send me a letter, for you comfort a very desolate heart.

SELF-SACRIFICE

[To ——]

July 10, 1846.

. . . I see you are in a dilemma, and one of a peculiar and difficult nature. Two paths lie before you; you conscientiously wish to choose the right one, even though it be the most steep, straight, and rugged; but you do not know which is the right one; you cannot decide

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

whether duty and religion command you to go out into the cold and friendless world, and there to earn your living by governess drudgery, or whether they enjoin your continued stay with your aged mother, neglecting, *for the present*, every prospect of independency for yourself, and putting up with daily inconvenience, sometimes even with privations. I can well imagine, that it is next to impossible for you to decide for yourself in this matter, so I will decide it for you. At least, I will tell you what is my earnest conviction on the subject; I will show you candidly how the question strikes me. The right path is that which necessitates the greatest sacrifice of self-interest — which implies the greatest good to others; and this path, steadily followed, will lead, I believe, in time, to prosperity and to happiness; though it may seem, at the outset, to tend quite in a contrary direction. Your mother is both old and infirm; old and infirm people have but few sources of happiness — fewer almost than the comparatively young and healthy can conceive; to deprive them of one of these is cruel. If your mother is more composed when you are with her, stay with her. If she would be unhappy, in case you left her, stay with her. It will not apparently, as far as short-sighted humanity can see, be for your advantage to remain at —, nor will you be praised and admired for remaining at home to comfort your mother; yet, probably, your own conscience will approve, and if it does, stay with

Charlotte Brontë

her. I recommend you to do what I am trying to do myself.

IMAGINATION NEEDED

[TO GEORGE HENRY LEWES, WHO WAS TO REVIEW
"JANE EYRE" IN *Frazer's Magazine*]

HAWORTH, November 6, 1847.

. . . You advise me, too, not to stray far from the ground of experience, as I become weak when I enter the region of fiction; and you say, "real experience is perennially interesting, and to all men."

I feel that this also is true: but, dear sir, is not the real experience of each individual very limited? And, if a writer dwells upon that solely or principally, is he not in danger of repeating himself, and also of becoming an egotist? Then, too, imagination is a strong, restless faculty, which claims to be heard and exercised; are we to be quite deaf to her cry, and insensate to her struggles? When she shows us bright pictures, are we never to look at them and try to reproduce them? And when she is eloquent, and speaks rapidly and urgently in our ear, are we not to write to her dictation?

A BOOK IN PART MAY WRITE ITSELF

[TO GEORGE HENRY LEWES]

HAWORTH, January 12, 1848.

I thank you then sincerely for your generous review; and it is with the sense of double content

I express my gratitude, because I am now sure the tribute is not superfluous or obtrusive. You were not severe on "Jane Eyre"; you were very lenient. I am glad you told me my faults plainly in private, for in your public notice you touch on them so lightly, I should perhaps have passed them over, thus indicated, with too little reflection.

I mean to observe your warning about being careful how I undertake new works; my stock of materials is not abundant, but very slender; and, besides, neither my experience, my acquirements, nor my powers, are sufficiently varied to justify my ever becoming a frequent writer. I tell you this, because your article in *Frazer* left in me an uneasy impression that you were disposed to think better of the author of "Jane Eyre" than that individual deserved; and I would rather you had a correct than a flattering opinion of me, even though I should never see you.

If I ever do write another book, I think I will have nothing of what you call "melodrama"; I think so, but I am not sure. I think, too, I will endeavour to follow the counsel which shines out of Miss Austen's "mild eyes," "to finish more and be more subdued"; but neither am I sure of that. When authors write best, or, at least, when they write most fluently, an influence seems to waken in them, which becomes their master — which will have its own way — putting out of view all behests but its own, dictating certain words, and insisting on their being used, whether vehement or measured in their nature;

new-moulding characters, giving unthought-of turns to incidents, rejecting carefully elaborated old ideas, and suddenly creating and adopting new ones.

Is it not so? And should we try to counteract this influence? Can we indeed counteract it?

ORIGINALS OF HER CHARACTERS

HER SINCERITY

[TO W. S. WILLIAMS]

HAWORTH, September 21, 1849.

MY DEAR SIR: I am obliged to you for preserving my secret [anonymity] being at least as anxious as ever (more anxious I cannot well be) to keep quiet. You asked me in one of your letters lately, whether I thought I should escape identification in Yorkshire. I am so little known, that I think I shall. Besides, the book is far less founded on the real, than perhaps appears. It would be difficult to explain to you how little actual experience I have had of life, how few persons I have known, and how very few have known me.

As an instance how the characters have been managed, take that of Mr. Helstone. If this character had an original, it was in the person of a clergyman who died some years since at the advanced age of eighty. I never saw him except once — at the consecration of a church — when I was a child of ten years old. I was then struck with his appearance, and stern, martial air. At a subsequent period, I heard him talked about

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

in the neighbourhood where he had resided: some mention him with enthusiasm — others with detestation. I listened to various anecdotes, balanced evidence against evidence, and drew an inference. The original of Mr. Hall I have seen; he knows me slightly; but he would as soon think I had closely observed him or taken him for a character — he would as soon, indeed, suspect me of writing a book — a novel — as he would his dog, Prince. Margaret Hall called “Jane Eyre” a “wicked book,” on the authority of the *Quarterly*; an expression which coming from her, I will here confess, struck somewhat deep. It opened my eyes to the harm the *Quarterly* had done. Margaret would not have called it “wicked,” if she had not been told so.

No matter — whether known or unknown — misjudged, or the contrary — I am resolved not to write otherwise. I shall bend as my powers tend. The two human beings [sisters] who understood me, and whom I understood, are gone; I have some that love me yet, and whom I love, without expecting, or having a right to expect, that they shall perfectly understand me. I am satisfied; but I must have my own way in the matter of writing. The loss of what we possess nearest and dearest to us in this world, produces an effect upon the character: we search out what we have yet left that can support, and, when found, we cling to it with a hold of new-strung tenacity. The faculty of imagination lifted me when I was sinking, three months

Charlotte Brontë

ago; its active exercise has kept my head above water since; its results cheer me now, for I feel that they have enabled me to give pleasure to others. I am thankful to God, who gave me the faculty; and it is for me a part of my religion to defend this gift, and to profit by its possession.

WHERE FRIENDSHIP MAY DISAPPOINT

[TO W. S. WILLIAMS]

July 21, 1851.

. . . I could not help wondering whether Cornhill will ever change for me, as Oxford has changed for you. I have some pleasant associations connected with it now — will these alter their character some day?

Perhaps they may — though I have faith to the contrary, because I think I do not exaggerate my partialities; I think I take faults along with excellences — blemishes together with beauties. And, besides, in the matter of friendship, I have observed that disappointment here arises chiefly, not from liking our friends too well, or thinking of them too highly, but rather from an over-estimate of their liking for and opinion of us; and that if we guard ourselves with sufficient scrupulousness of care from error in this direction and can be content, and even happy to give more affection than we receive — can make just comparison of circumstances, and be severely accurate in drawing, inferences thence, and never let self-love blind our eyes — I think we may manage to get through life with consistency

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

and constancy, unembittered by that misanthropy which springs from revulsions of feeling. All this sounds a little metaphysical, but it is good sense if you consider it. The moral of it is, that if we would build on a sure foundation in friendship, we must love our friends for their sakes rather than for our own; we must look at their truth to themselves, full as much as their truth to us. In the latter case, every wound to self-love would be a cause of coldness; in the former, only some painful change in the friend's character and disposition — some fearful breach in his allegiance to his better self — could alienate the heart.

How interesting your old maiden-cousin's gossip about your parents must have been to you; and how gratifying to find that the reminiscence turned on none but pleasant facts and characteristics! Life must, indeed, be slow in that little decaying hamlet amongst the chalk hills. After all, depend upon it, it is better to be worn out with work in a thronged community, than to perish of inaction in a stagnant solitude: take this truth into consideration whenever you get tired of work and bustle.

NOVELTY VERSUS ORIGINALITY

[TO MRS. GASKELL]

HAWORTH, August 6, 1851.

. . . Then I feel sure you speak justly of Thackeray's lecture. You do well to set aside odious comparisons, and to wax im-

patient of that trite twaddle about "nothing newness"—a jargon which simply proves, in those who habitually use it, a coarse and feeble faculty of appreciation; an inability to discern the relative value of originality and novelty, a lack of that refined perception which, dispensing with the stimulus of an ever-new subject, can derive sufficiency of pleasure from freshness of treatment. To such critics, the prime of a summer morning would bring no delight; wholly occupied with railing at their cook for not having provided a novel and piquant breakfast-dish, they would remain insensible to such influences as lie in sunrise, dew, and breeze: therein would be "nothing new."

AN UNHASTING WORKER

[In the autumn of 1851 Charlotte Brontë's health became more and more impaired. She had begun "Villette," and her publishers were impatient for its completion. She wrote to them:]

. . . It is not at all likely that my book will be ready at the time you mention. If my health is spared, I shall get on with it as fast as is consistent with its being done, if not well, yet as well as I can do it. Not one whit faster. When the mood leaves me (it has left me now, without vouchsafing so much as a word or a message when it will return) I put by the MS. and wait till it comes back again. God knows, I sometimes have to wait long—very long it seems to me. Meantime, if I might make a

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

request to you, it would be this. Please to say nothing about my book till it is written, and in your hands. You may not like it. I am not myself elated with it as far as it is gone, and authors, you need not be told, are always tenderly indulgent, even blindly partial to their own. Even if it should turn out reasonably well, still I regard it as ruin to the prosperity of an ephemeral book like a novel, to be much talked of beforehand, as if it were something great. People are apt to conceive, or at least to profess, exaggerated expectation, such as no performance can realise: then ensue disappointment and the due revenge, detraction, and failure. If when I write, I were to think of the critics who, I know, are waiting for Currer Bell, [her pseudonym] ready "to break all his bones or ever he comes to the bottom of the den," my hand would fall paralysed on my desk. However, I can but do my best, and then muffle my head in the mantle of Patience, and sit down at her feet and wait.

GEORGE ELIOT

[Marian Evans, better known as George Eliot, was born in 1819 and lived to be sixty-one years of age. Her husband, Mr. J. W. Cross, has published her life, almost wholly in her own words, as transcribed from her letters and journals. Its chapters have been laid under contribution in the pages which follow.

In the "List of Books," issued by the American Library Association, Boston, is this note:

"George Eliot is one of the great English novelists, and among the world's greatest women of letters. In variety of natural qualities and completeness of intellectual equipment Sir Walter Scott is her only equal in English prose fiction. George Eliot may be regarded as the first of the moderns. Heroes whose deeds shine before men had no attraction for her; she took no interest in the exceptional, the dazzling or the picturesque; she had apparently no belief in primitive human emotion or passion uninfluenced by thought or reason as the spring of action. She gave to fiction a new laurel and allied it with abstract philosophy, mental and moral. With the scientist's gift of analysis she combined the artist's power of creation. The vitality and completeness of her figures and their movements through her selected train of circumstances toward the logical destiny of character are the masterly expression of both the analytic and creative mind. The one principle to which she was devoutly attached was that of duty, the idea of the nobility of self-sacrifice, and the one just criticism involving her whole work is that this attachment to a splendid idea of right leaves a depressing realisation of the unmitigated sorrow of living. No novelist ever exercised a profounder moral influence on contemporaries, and none has delivered so clear and strong a message for the right conduct of life.'"]

NO SELF-DENIAL IN GENUINE VIRTUE

[In her twenty-third year George Eliot writes to Miss Lewis, at Coventry, a letter in which powers of thought and expression are already unmistakable:]

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

. . . How do you go on for society, for communion of spirit, the drop of nectar in the cup of mortals? But why do I say the drop? The mind that feels its value will get large draughts from some source, if denied it in the most commonly chosen way.

'Mid the rich store of nature's gifts to man
Each has his loves, close wedded to his soul
By fine association's golden links.
As the Great Spirit bids creation teem
With conscious being and intelligence,
So, man, His miniature resemblance, gives
To matter's every form a speaking soul,
An emanation from his spirit's fount,
The impress true of its peculiar seal.
Here finds he Thy best image, sympathy.

Beautiful egoism, to quote one's own. But where is not this same ego? The martyr at the stake seeks its gratification as much as the court sycophant, the difference lying in the comparative dignity and beauty of the two egos. People absurdly talk of self-denial. Why, there is none in virtue, to a being of moral excellence: the greatest torture to such a soul would be to run counter to the dictates of conscience; to wallow in the slough of meanness, deception, revenge, or sensuality. This was Paul's idea in the first chapter of the 2d Epistle to Timothy (I think that is the passage).

George Eliot

HAPPINESS AS AN ART

[To her friend, Miss Sara Hennell, she wrote May 3, 1844, while translating Strauss' "Life of Jesus"']

. . . You will soon be settled and enjoying the blessed spring and summer time. I hope you are looking forward to it with as much delight as I. One has to spend so many years in learning how to be happy. I am just beginning to make some progress in the science, and I hope to disprove Young's theory that "as soon as we have found the key of life it opes the gates of death." Every year strips us of at least one vain expectation, and teaches us to reckon some solid good in its stead. I never will believe that our youngest days are our happiest. What a miserable augury for the progress of the race and the destination of the individual if the more matured and enlightened state is the less happy one! Childhood is only the beautiful and happy time in contemplation and retrospect: to the child it is full of deep sorrows, the meaning of which is unknown. Witness colic and whooping-cough and dread of ghosts, to say nothing of hell and Satan, and an offended deity in the sky, who was angry when I wanted too much plumcake. Then the sorrows of older persons, which children see but cannot understand, are worse than all. All this to prove that we are happier than when we were seven years old, and that we shall be happier when we are forty than we are now,

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

which I call a comfortable doctrine, and one worth trying to believe!

HER LOVE FOR SARA HENNELL

[To whom she wrote on April 21, 1852:]

. . . If there is any change in my affection for you it is that I love you more than ever, not less. I have as perfect a friendship for you as my imperfect nature can feel — a friendship in which deep respect and admiration are sweetened by a sort of flesh-and-blood sisterly feeling and the happy consciousness that I have your affection, however undeservedly, in return. I have confidence that this friendship can never be shaken; that it must last while I last, and that the supposition of its ever being weakened by a momentary irritation is too contemptibly absurd for me to take the trouble to deny it. As to your whole conduct to me, from the first day I knew you, it has been so generous and sympathetic that, if I did not heartily love you, I should feel deep gratitude — but love excludes gratitude. It is impossible that I should ever love two women better than I love you and Cara. Indeed, it seems to me that I can never love any one so well; and it is certain that I can never have any friend — not even a husband — who would supply the loss of those associations with the past which belong to you. Do believe in my love for you, and that it will remain as long as I have my senses, because it is interwoven with my best nature, and is

dependent, not on any accidents of manner, but on long experience, which has confirmed the instinctive attraction of earlier days.

A FRIENDLY EXPOSTULATION

[Miss Sara Hennell's convictions were in some respects opposed to those of her old friend, George Eliot. This led to a slight coolness on Miss Hennell's part. On September 14, 1865, George Eliot writes to her:]

We came home again on Thursday night — this day week — after a month's absence in Normandy and Brittany. I have been thinking of you very often since, but believed that you did not care to have the interruption of letters just now, and would rather defer correspondence till your mind was freer. If I had suspected that you would feel any want satisfied by a letter I should certainly have written. I had not heard of Miss Bonham Carter's death, else I should have conceived something of your state of mind. I think you and I are alike in this, that we can get no good out of pretended comforts, which are the devices of self-love, but would rather, in spite of pain, grow into the endurance of all "naked truths." So I say no word about your great loss, except that I love you, and sorrow with you.

The circumstances of life — the changes that take place in ourselves — hem in the expression of affections and memories that live within us, and enter almost into every day, and long separations often make intercourse difficult

when the opportunity comes. But the delight I had in you, and in the hours we spent together, and in all your acts of friendship to me, is really part of my life, and can never die out of me. I see distinctly how much poorer I should have been if I had never known you. If you had seen more of me in late years, you would not have such almost cruel thoughts as that the book into which you have faithfully put your experience and best convictions could make you "repugnant" to me. Whatever else my growth may have been, it has not been toward irreverence and ready rejection of what other minds can give me. You once unhappily mistook my feeling and point of view in something I wrote apropos of an argument in your "Aids to Faith" and that made me think it better that we should not write on large and difficult subjects in hasty letters. But it has often been painful to me — I should say, it has constantly been painful to me — that you have ever since inferred me to be in a hard and unsympathetic state about your views and your writing. But I am habitually disposed myself to the same unbelief in the sympathy that is given me, and am the last person who should be allowed to complain of such unbelief in another. And it is very likely that I may have been faulty and disagreeable in my expressions.

Excuse all my many mistakes, dear Sara, and never believe otherwise than that I have a glow of joy when you write to me, as if my existence

were some good to you. I know that I am, and can be, very little practically; but to have the least value for your thought is what I care much to be assured of.

Perhaps, in the cooler part of the autumn, when your book is out of your hands, you will like to move from home a little and see your London friends?

BEGINS TO WRITE FICTION

[FROM HER JOURNAL]

September, 1856, made a new era in my life, for it was then I began to write fiction. It had always been a vague dream of mine that some time or other I might write a novel; and my shadowy conception of what the novel was to be, varied, of course, from one epoch of my life to another. But I never went further toward the actual writing of the novel than an introductory chapter describing a Staffordshire village and the life of the neighbouring farm-houses; and as the years passed on I lost any hope that I should ever be able to write a novel, just as I desponded about everything else in my future life. I always thought I was deficient in dramatic power, both of construction and dialogue, but I felt I should be at my ease in the descriptive parts of a novel. My "introductory chapter" was pure description, though there were good materials in it for dramatic presentation. It happened to be among the papers I

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

had with me in Germany, and one evening at Berlin something led me to read it to George. He was struck with it as a bit of concrete description, and it suggested to him the possibility of my being able to write a novel, though he distrusted — indeed, disbelieved in — my possession of any dramatic power. Still, he began to think that I might as well try some time what I could do in fiction, and by and by, when we came back to England, and I had greater success than he ever expected in other kinds of writing, his impression that it was worth while to see how far my mental power would go toward the production of a novel, was strengthened. He began to say very positively, "You must try and write a story," and when we were at Tenby he urged me to begin at once. I deferred it, however, after my usual fashion with work that does not present itself as an absolute duty. But one morning, as I was thinking what should be the subject of my first story, my thoughts merged themselves into a dreamy doze, and I imagined myself writing a story of which the title was "The Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton." I was soon wide awake again and told George. He said, "Oh, what a capital title!" and from that time I had settled in my mind that this should be my first story. George used to say, "It may be a failure — it may be that you are unable to write fiction. Or, perhaps, it may be just good enough to warrant your trying again." Again, "You may write a

masterpiece at once — there's no telling." But his prevalent impression was, that though I could hardly write a poor novel, my effort would want the highest quality of fiction — dramatic presentation. He used to say, "You have wit, description, and philosophy — those go a good way toward the production of a novel. It is worth while for you to try the experiment."

HER FIDELITY IN CREATION

[John Blackwood, of Edinburgh, who published "Amos Barton," wrote George Eliot in high praise of her work, adding a little critical comment. In a reply of February 18, 1857, she said:]

I am unable to alter anything in relation to the delineation or development of character, as my stories always grow out of my psychological conception of the *dramatis personæ*. For example, the behaviour of Caterina in the gallery is essential to my conception of her nature, and to the development of that nature in the plot. My artistic bent is directed not at all to the presentation of eminently irreproachable characters, but to the presentation of mixed human beings in such a way as to call forth tolerant judgment, pity, and sympathy. And I cannot stir a step aside from what I feel to be true in character. If anything strikes you as untrue to human nature in my delineations, I shall be very glad if you will point it out to me, that I may reconsider

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

the matter. But, alas! inconsistencies and weaknesses are not untrue. I hope that your doubts about the plot will be removed by the further development of the story. Meanwhile, warmest thanks for your encouraging letters.

READERS OFTEN GUESS WRONGLY

[From a note to her publisher, John Blackwood, May 28, 1858]

It is invariably the case that when people discover certain points of coincidence in a fiction with facts that happen to have come to their knowledge, they believe themselves able to furnish a key to the whole. That is amusing enough to the author, who knows from what widely sundered portions of experience — from what a combination of subtle, shadowy suggestions, with certain actual objects and events, his story has been formed. It would be a very difficult thing for me to furnish a key to my stories myself. But where there is no exact memory of the past, any story with a few remembered points of character or of incident may pass for a history.

THE RECEPTION OF "ADAM BEDE"

[In 1859 "Adam Bede" was published, and met at once with great success. To a friend, Miss Bray, George Eliot wrote as to the reception of "Adam Bede" by her friends and neighbours:]

The things you tell me are just such as I need to know — I mean about the help my book is to

the people who read it. The weight of my future life — the self-questioning whether my nature will be able to meet the heavy demands upon it, both of personal duty and intellectual production, presses upon me almost continually in a way that prevents me even from tasting the quiet joy I might have in the work done. Buoyancy and exultation, I fancy, are out of the question when one has lived so long as I have. But I am the better for every word of encouragement, and am helped over many days by such a note as yours. I often think of my dreams when I was four or five and twenty. I thought then how happy fame would make me! I feel no regret that the fame, as such, brings no pleasure; but it is a grief to me that I do not constantly feel strong in thankfulness that my past life has vindicated its uses and given me reason for gladness that such an unpromising woman child was born into the world. I ought not to care about small annoyances, and it is chiefly egoism that makes them annoyances. I had quite an enthusiastic letter from Herbert Spencer the other day about "Adam Bede." He says he feels the better for reading it — really words to be treasured up. I can't bear the idea of appearing further in the papers. And there is no one now except people who would not be convinced, though one rose from the dead, to whom any statement apropos of Liggins [who claimed to have written "Adam Bede"] would be otherwise than superfluous. I dare

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

say some "investigator" of the Bracebridge order will arise after I am dead and revive the story — and perhaps posterity will believe in Liggins. Why not? A man a little while ago wrote a pamphlet to prove that the Waverley novels were chiefly written, not by Walter Scott, but by Thomas Scott and his wife Elizabeth. The main evidence being that several people thought Thomas cleverer than Walter, and that in the list of the Canadian regiment of Scots to which Thomas belonged many of the names of the Waverley novels occurred — among the rest Monk — and in "Woodstock" there is a General Monk! The writer expected to get a great reputation by his pamphlet, and I think it might have suggested to Mr. B. his style of critical and historical inference. I must tell you, in confidence, that Dickens has written to me the noblest, most touching words about "Adam" — not hyperbolical compliments, but expressions of deep feeling. He says the reading made an epoch in his life.

ANXIETY FOR TRUTH IN HER ART.

[To her publisher, John Blackwood, she wrote October 16, 1859, in comment upon her critics:]

I do feel more than I ought about outside sayings and doings, and I constantly rebuke myself for all that part of my susceptibility, which I know to be weak and egoistic; still what is said about one's art is not merely a personal

George Eliot

matter—it touches the very highest things one lives for. Truth in art is so startling that no one can believe in it as art, and the specific forms of religious life which have made some of the grandest elements in human history are looked down upon as if they were not within the artist's sympathy and veneration and intensely dramatic reproduction. "I do well to be angry" on that ground, don't I? The simple fact is, that I never saw anything of my aunt's writing, and Dinah's words came from me "as the tears come because our heart is full, and we can't help them."

DOING WITHOUT OPIUM

[To Madame Bodichon, on December 26, 1860, George Eliot wrote a letter full of sympathy. In the course of her pages there occurs:]

The bright point in your letter is that you are in a happy state of mind yourself. For the rest, we must wait, and not be impatient with those who have their inward trials, though everything outward seems to smile on them. It seems to those who are differently placed that the time of freedom from strong ties and urgent claims must be very precious for the ends of self-culture and good, helpful work toward the world at large. But it hardly ever is so. As for the forms and ceremonies, I feel no regret that any should turn to them for comfort if they can find comfort in them; sympathetically

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

I enjoy them myself. But I have faith in the working out of higher possibilities than the Catholic or any other Church has presented; and those who have strength to wait and endure are bound to accept no formula which their whole souls — their intellect as well as their emotions — do not embrace with entire reverence. The "highest calling and election" is to do without opium, and live through all our pain with conscious, clear-eyed endurance.

[To the same correspondent, on February 15, 1862:]

. . . I think the highest and best thing is rather to suffer with real suffering than to be happy in the imagination of an unreal good. I would rather know that the beings I love are in some trouble, and suffer because of it, even though I can't help them, than be fancying them happy when they are not so, and making myself comfortable on the strength of that false belief. And so I am impatient of all ignorance and concealment. I don't say "that is wise," but simply "that is my nature." I can enter into what you have felt, for serious illness, such as seems to bring death near, makes one feel the simple human brother and sisterhood so strongly that those we were apt to think almost indifferent to us before, touch the very quick of our hearts. I suppose if we happened only to hold the hand of a hospital patient when she was dying, her face, and all the memories along

with it, would seem to lie deeper in our experience than all we knew of many old friends and blood relations.

HIGHER EDUCATION FOR WOMEN

[Higher education for women was often in the thoughts of George Eliot. And yet in the agitations which sought to open the universities to women, she feared that there might be a danger. Her feeling is thus expressed to Madame Bodichon, April 6, 1868:]

. . . What I should like to be sure of, as a result of higher education for women — a result that will come to pass over my grave — is their recognition of the great amount of social unproductive labour which needs to be done by women, and which is now either not done at all or done wretchedly. No good can come to women, more than to any class of male mortals, while each aims at doing the highest kind of work, which ought rather to be held in sanctity as what only the few can do well. I believe, and I want it to be well shown, that a more thorough education will tend to do away with the odious vulgarity of our notions about functions and employment, and to propagate the true gospel, that the deepest disgrace is to insist on doing work for which we are unfit — to do work of any sort badly. There are many points of this kind that want being urged, but they do not come well from me.

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

BOOKS WHICH HAVE INFLUENCED ME

[In 1887 the *British Weekly*, London, published a series of articles from men of prominence, each of whom told about "Books which have influenced me." Robert Louis Stevenson's contribution follows:

His works in various editions; his *Life*, by Graham Balfour; his *Letters*, edited by Sydney Colvin, are published by C. Scribner's Sons, New York.]

THE EDITOR has somewhat insidiously laid a trap for his correspondents, the question put appearing at first so innocent, truly cutting so deep. It is not, indeed, until after some reconnaissance and review that the writer awakes to find himself engaged upon something in the nature of autobiography, or, perhaps worse, upon a chapter in the life of that little beautiful brother whom we once all had, and whom we have all lost and mourned, the man we ought to have been, the man we hoped to be. But when word has been passed (even to an editor), it should, if possible, be kept; and if sometimes I am wise and say too little, and sometimes weak and say too much, the blame must lie at the door of the person who entrapped me.

The most influential books, and the truest in their influence, are works of fiction. They do not pin the reader to a dogma, which he must afterward discover to be inexact; they

do not teach him a lesson, which he must afterward unlearn. They repeat, they rearrange, they clarify the lessons of life; they disengage us from ourselves, they constrain us to the acquaintance of others; and they show us the web of experience, not as we can see it for ourselves, but with a singular change — that monstrous, consuming *ego* of ours being, for the nonce, struck out. To be so, they must be reasonably true to the human comedy; and any work that is so serves the turn of instruction. But the course of our education is answered best by those poems and romances where we breathe a magnanimous atmosphere of thought and meet generous and pious characters. Shakespeare has served me best. Few living friends have had upon me an influence so strong for good as Hamlet or Rosalind. The last character, already well beloved in the reading, I had the good fortune to see, I must think, in an impressionable hour, played by Mrs. Scott Siddons. Nothing has ever more moved, more delighted, more refreshed me; nor has the influence quite passed away. Kent's brief speech over the dying Lear had a great effect upon my mind, and was the burthen of my reflections for long, so profoundly, so touchingly generous did it appear in sense, so overpowering in expression. Perhaps my dearest and best friend outside of Shakespeare is D'Artagnan — the elderly D'Artagnan of the "Vicomte de Bragelonne." I know not a

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

more human soul, nor, in his way, a finer; I shall be very sorry for the man who is so much of a pedant in morals that he cannot learn from the Captain of Musketeers. Lastly, I must name the "Pilgrim's Progress," a book that breathes of every beautiful and valuable emotion.

But of works of art little can be said; their influence is profound and silent, like the influence of nature; they mould by contact; we drink them up like water, and are bettered, yet know not how. It is in books more specifically didactic that we can follow out the effect, and distinguish and weigh and compare. A book which has been very influential upon me fell early into my hands, and so may stand first, though I think its influence was only sensible later on, and perhaps still keeps growing, for it is a book not easily outlived—the "Essays" of Montaigne. That temperate and genial picture of life is a great gift to place in the hands of persons of to-day; they will find in these smiling pages a magazine of heroism and wisdom, all of an antique strain; they will have their "linen decencies" and excited orthodoxies fluttered, and will (if they have any gift of reading) perceive that these have not been fluttered without some excuse and ground of reason; and (again if they have any gift of reading) they will end by seeing that this old gentleman was in a dozen ways a finer fellow, and held in a dozen ways a nobler view of life, than they or their contemporaries.

The next book, in order of time, to influence me, was the New Testament, and in particular the Gospel according to St. Matthew. I believe it would startle and move any one if they could make a certain effort of imagination and read it freshly like a book, not droningly and dully like a portion of the Bible. Any one would then be able to see in it those truths which we are all courteously supposed to know and all modestly refrain from applying. But upon this subject it is perhaps better to be silent.

I come next to Whitman's "Leaves of Grass," a book of singular service, a book which tumbled the world upside down for me, blew into space a thousand cobwebs of genteel and ethical illusion, and, having thus shaken my tabernacle of lies, set me back again upon a strong foundation of all the original and manly virtues. But it is, once more, only a book for those who have the gift of reading. I will be very frank—I believe it is so with all good books, except perhaps, fiction. The average man lives, and must live, so wholly in convention, that gunpowder charges of the truth are more apt to discompose than to invigorate his creed. Either he cries out upon blasphemy and indecency, and crouches the closer round that little idol of part-truths and part-conveniences which is the contemporary deity, or he is convinced by what is new, forgets what is old, and becomes truly blasphemous and indecent himself. New truth is only useful to supplement the old; rough

truth is only wanted to expand, not to destroy, our civil and often elegant conventions. He who cannot judge had better stick to fiction and the daily papers. There he will get little harm, and, in the first at least, some good.

Close upon the back of my discovery of Whitman, I came under the influence of Herbert Spencer. No more persuasive rabbi exists, and few better. How much of his vast structure will bear the touch of time, how much is clay and how much brass, it were too curious to inquire. But his words, if dry, are always manly and honest; there dwells in his pages a spirit of highly abstract joy, plucked naked like an algebraic symbol, but still joyful; and the reader will find there a *caput-mortuum* [worthless remains] of piety, with little indeed of its loveliness but with most of its essentials; and these two qualities make him a wholesome, as his intellectual vigour makes him a bracing, writer. I should be much of a hound if I lost my gratitude to Herbert Spencer.

"Goethe's Life," by Lewes, had a great importance for me when it first fell into my hands — a strange instance of the partiality of man's good and man's evil. I know no one whom I less admire than Goethe; he seems a very epitome of the sins of genius, breaking open the doors of private life, and wantonly wounding friends, in that crowning offence of "Werther," and in his own character a mere pen-and-ink Napoleon, conscious of the rights

and duties of superior talents as a Spanish inquisitor was conscious of the rights and duties of his office. And yet in his fine devotion to his art, in his honest and serviceable friendship for Schiller, what lessons are contained! Biography, usually so false to its office, does here for once perform for us some of the work of fiction, reminding us, that is, of the truly mingled tissue of man's nature, and how huge faults and shining virtues cohabit and persevere in the same character. History serves us well to this effect, but in the originals, not in the pages of the popular epitomiser, who is bound, by the very nature of his task, to make us feel the difference of epochs instead of the essential identity of man, and even in the originals only to those who can recognise their own human virtues and defects in strange forms, often inverted and under strange names, often interchanged. Martial is a poet of no good repute, and it gives a man new thoughts to read his works dispassionately, and find in this unseemly jester's serious passages the image of a kind, wise, and self-respecting gentleman. It is customary, I suppose, in reading Martial, to leave out these pleasant verses; I never heard of them, at least, until I found them for myself; and this partiality is one among a thousand things that help to build up our distorted and hysterical conception of the great Roman empire.

This brings us by a natural transition to a

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

very noble book — the “Meditations” of Marcus Aurelius. The dispassionate gravity, the noble forgetfulness of self, the tenderness of others, that are there expressed and were practised on so great a scale in the life of its writer, make this book a book quite by itself. No one can read it and not be moved. Yet it scarcely or rarely appeals to the feelings — those very mobile, those not very trusty parts of man. Its address lies farther back: its lesson comes more deeply home; when you have read, you carry away with you a memory of the man himself; it is as though you had touched a loyal hand, looked into brave eyes, and made a noble friend; there is another bond on you thenceforward, binding you to life and to the love of virtue.

Wordsworth should perhaps come next. Every one has been influenced by Wordsworth, and it is hard to tell precisely how. A certain innocence, a rugged austerity of joy, a sight of the stars, “the silence that there is among the hills,” something of the cold thrill of dawn, cling to his work and give it a particular address to what is best in us. I do not know that you learn a lesson; you need not — Mill did not — agree with any one of his beliefs; and yet the spell is cast. Such are the best teachers: a dogma learned is only a new error — the old one was perhaps as good; but a spirit communicated is a perpetual possession. These best teachers climb beyond teaching to the plane

of art; it is themselves, and what is best in themselves, that they communicate.

I should never forgive myself if I forgot "The Egoist." It is art, if you like, but it belongs purely to didactic art, and from all the novels I have read (and I have read thousands) stands in a place by itself. Here is a Nathan for the modern David; here is a book to send the blood into men's faces. Satire, the angry picture of human faults, is not great art; we can all be angry with our neighbour; what we want is to be shown not his defects, of which we are too conscious, but his merits, to which we are too blind. And "The Egoist" is a satire; so much must be allowed; but it is a satire of a singular quality, which tells you nothing of that obvious mote which is engaged from first to last with that invisible beam. It is yourself that is hunted down; these are your own faults that are dragged into the day and numbered, with lingering relish, with cruel cunning and precision. A young friend of Mr. Meredith's (as I have the story) came to him in an agony. "This is too bad of you," he cried. "Willoughby is me!" "No, my dear fellow," said the author, "he is all of us." I have read "The Egoist" five or six times myself, and I mean to read it again; for I am like the young friend of the anecdote — I think Willoughby an unmanly but a very serviceable exposure of myself.

I suppose, when I am done, I shall find that

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

I have forgotten much that was most influential, as I see already I have forgotten Thoreau, and Hazlitt, whose paper "On the Spirit of Obligations" was a turning point in my life, and Penn, whose little book of aphorisms had a brief but strong effect on me, and Mitford's "Tales of Old Japan," wherein I learned for the first time the proper attitude of any rational man to his country's laws — a secret found, and kept, in the Asiatic islands. That I should commemorate all is more than I can hope or the editor could ask. It will be more to the point, after having said so much upon improving books, to say a word or two about the improvable reader. The gift of reading, as I have called it, is not very common, nor very generally understood. It consists, first of all, in a vast intellectual endowment — a free grace, I find I must call it — by which a man rises to understand that he is not punctually right, nor those from whom he differs absolutely wrong. He may hold dogmas; he may hold them passionately; and he may know that others hold them but coldly, or hold them differently, or hold them not at all. Well, if he has the gift of reading, these others will be full of meat for him. They will see the other side of propositions and the other side of virtues. He need not change his dogma for that, but he may change his reading of that dogma, and he must supplement and correct his deductions from it. A human

truth, which is always very much a lie, hides as much of life as it displays. It is men who hold another truth, or, as it seems to us, perhaps, a dangerous lie, who can extend our restricted field of knowledge, and rouse our drowsy consciences. Something that seems quite new, or that seems insolently false or very dangerous, is the test of a reader. If he tries to see what it means, what truth excuses it, he has the gift, and let him read. If he is merely hurt, or offended, or exclaims upon his author's folly, he had better take to the daily papers; he will never be a reader.

And here, with the aptest illustrative force, after I have laid down my part-truth, I must step in with its opposite. For, after all, we are vessels of a very limited content. Not all men can read all books; it is only in a chosen few that any man will find his appointed food; and the fittest lessons are the most palatable, and make themselves welcome to the mind. A writer learns this early, and it is his chief support; he goes on unafraid, laying down the law; and he is sure at heart that most of what he says is demonstrably false, and much of a mingled strain, and some hurtful, and very little good for service; but he is sure besides that when his words fall into the hands of any genuine reader, they will be weighed and winnowed, and only that which suits will be assimilated; and when they fall into the hands of one who cannot intelligently read, they come

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

there quite silent and inarticulate, falling upon deaf ears, and his secret is kept as if he had not written.

SKETCHES HIS CAREER TO 1887

[During the winter of 1887-88, Robert Louis Stevenson resided at Saranac Lake, in the Adirondacks. In a letter to George Iles he thus sketched his work to the autumn of 1887:]

SARANAC LAKE, N. Y., October 29, 1887.

DEAR MR. ILES: The undersigned was born in 1850, November the 13th, in the city of Edinburgh. He was always sick when he was a child. You will find a good deal of autobiographical matter in the new volumes of essays, "Memories and Portraits," soon to be issued by Charles Scribner's Sons. He — oh hang this! — I was educated for a civil engineer on my father's design, and was at the building of harbours and lighthouses, and worked in a carpenter's shop and a brass foundry and hung about wood yards and the like. Then it came out that I was learning nothing, and, on being tightly cross-questioned during a dreadful evening walk, I owned I cared for nothing but literature. My father said that was no profession, but I might be called to the bar if I chose; so, at the age of twenty-one, I began to study law.

Two years after I met Sidney Colvin, who took me up and introduced my work. My first paper appeared, just after I was twenty-three, in the

Portfolio, under the harmless anagram of "L. S. Stoneven." It was called "Roads." My second, written that same winter at Mentone, came out in *Macmillan*. It has been reprinted — "Ordered South." It took me pretty near three months to write, I imagine. No one ever had such pains to learn a trade as I had; but I slogged at it, day in, day out, and I frankly believe (thanks to my dire industry) I have done more with smaller gifts than almost any man of letters in the world. My first story (that I had dared to reprint) was "Will o' the Mill," written in France. The scenery is a kind of hash-up of the Murgthal in Baden and the Brenner Pass in the Tyrol, over which I went when I was twelve. The next was "A Lodging for a Night," written concurrently with my study on Villon in "Men and Books." The first "New Arabian Nights," properly so called, was begun at the Burford Bridge Inn (see a gossip in "Romance," in the forthcoming volume), where I stayed to be near George Meredith; they were continued in London, Edinburgh, Paris, Barbizon, and finished at Le Monastère (see "Travels with a Donkey"), all within about five months; this will give you a notion of my roving ways. That same autumn I wrote "Providence and the Guitar," part at London, part in Cambridge; so that year saw me quite the story teller. It was that same spring that I had brought out "An Inland Voyage," my first volume. "The Pavilion on the Links," was begun in London, finished in

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

Monterey, California. "Treasure Island," begun at Braemar, finished at Davos; the whole in two bursts of about fifteen days each, my quickest piece of work. "Kidnapped" was all written at Bournemouth, inside of a year, in probably five months actual writing, and one of these months entirely over the last chapters, which had to be put together without interest or inspiration, almost word by word, for I was entirely worked out.

"Kidnapped," you may like to know, I consider infinitely my best, and, indeed, my only good story. "Prince Otto" was written at Hyères; it took me about five months, in the inside of a year, not counting the first chapter, which was written before at Kingussie. "Otto" was my hardest effort, for I wished to do something very swell, which did not quite come off. Whole chapters of "Otto" were written as often as five or six times, and one chapter, that of the Countess and the Princess, eight times by me and once by my wife — my wife's version was the second last. "The Treasure of Franchard" was mostly written at Kingussie. "Jekyll," "Olalla," "Markheim" were all written at Bournemouth. "The Dynamiter," begun at Hyères, finished at Bournemouth. "Thrawn Janet," at Kincaid, near Pitlochrie. "The Merry Men," begun at Pitlochrie, finished at Davos. My life of Fleeming Jenkin, now in the press, is another child of Bournemouth. "The Silverado Squatters" hails from Hyères, "Travels with a Donkey" from

Robert Louis Stevenson

Edinburgh, 'An Inland Voyage' from Edinburgh and Dieppe. In a forthcoming number of *Scribner's Magazine* you will find something about my dreams. This is enough gossip, I hope; if you want more let me know.

A WORD ON AMERICAN WRITERS

[The late Henry D. Lloyd, of Chicago, wrote "The Story of a Great Monopoly" and other striking articles in the *Atlantic Monthly*. These were sent to Stevenson, in whom they excited the notion of working the trusts into a story. He never carried out the project. He died at Vailima, Samoa, December 3, 1894. Seven years prior, from the midst of a violent snowstorm he wrote:]

SARANAC LAKE, December 14, 1887.

DEAR MR. ILES: Goodness knows what we have to thank you for — or I should say, what not. I was exceedingly interested by the articles of Mr. Lloyd, who is certainly a very capable, clever fellow: he writes the most workman-like article of any man known to me in America, unless it should be Parkman. Not a touch in Lloyd of the amateur; and bar James, Howells, and the aforesaid Parkman, I cannot call to mind one American writer who has not a little taint of it.

Our news is good, in so far as it concerns myself, not so good in so far as it concerns my wife, with whom I fear Saranac does not agree. She is down to New York for a change; it howls and blows, and rains and snows in a pleasant medley of ill weathers; and I am, from the midst of it, Yours most truly.

HENRY GEORGE

AUTHOR OF "PROGRESS AND POVERTY"

[Not a few great writers have been men of little formal education. They seem to have observed the supreme facts of life, to have felt its elemental forces, all the more directly and vividly for the absence of academic interpreters and guides. In this company are Bunyan and Burns, Franklin and Lincoln. Of their kindred is Henry George. His picturing faculty, his clear and massive style, have given his works a popularity new in economic discussion. All told more than five million copies of his books have been printed. While his convictions have been widely criticised, his honesty and ability have won him respect as sincere from opponents as from friends. His "Progress and Poverty," in an enlarged anniversary edition, "Protection or Free Trade," "The Science of Political Economy," and other works, together with his *Life*, by his son, ten volumes in all, are published by Doubleday, Page & Co., New York.

The *New York World*, in its evening edition, October 23, 1897, six days before the death of Henry George, published an interview which he accorded to Mr. W. V. Byars. Somewhat condensed it is here reproduced:]

GOES TO SEA AS A BOY

I WAS born in Philadelphia in 1839. My father owned a bookstore, and was a publisher in a not very large way. Afterward he was a clerk in the Custom House, and remained there quite a while. I myself began life in Philadelphia as a boy working for \$2 a week in the office of an importer of crockery. I did writing, carried bundles, or turned my hand to anything else there was to do.

Henry George

After that I went into the office of a marine adjuster, but I was very anxious to go to sea. My grandfather was a sea captain of considerable note in the early days of Philadelphia. He followed the sea from the time he was eight years old. He had taken part in the war of 1812, and had been captured by the British. I suppose I inherited my love of the sea from him or from hearing my father talk about him. At any rate, I went to sea, shipping as a foremast boy on the old ship *Hindoo*, an East India-man of 500 tons burden. I sailed from right here in New York, leaving the foot of Thirtieth street, on North river, going first to Melbourne and then to Calcutta.

When I got back to Philadelphia after this voyage I was about sixteen years old, and I felt like staying at home a while. So I went into the printing office of King & Baird. There I learned something of the trade, but soon afterward I went to sea again, going to Boston and back in a small coal schooner.

It was on this trip that I got the idea of going to California. I saw in the Delaware River a little side-wheel steamer that was being built for the lighthouse service. She was to be taken to California, and I made up my mind to go in her.

SHIPWRECK THREATENS

As a matter of fact, I did go. Off Hatteras we were struck by a hurricane, which came near being the last of us. I remember it vividly.

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

The boat's head was swung to under low-steam, but the sea broke over her fore and aft with such violence that we were in danger of foundering. We had to lighten ship, and a negro deckhand and I worked together throwing coal overboard. The sailing master hung on to the bridge, shouting to us through the speaking trumpet and barely able to make himself heard as he told us the work we were doing was for life or death.

We came through safely, but considerably damaged. Running along, we went into St. Thomas, then to Pernambuco and Rio Janeiro, and afterward to Montevideo. We did not go around the Horn, but through the Straits of Magellan. It was a most impressive sight — the deep, clear water around us and the snow-covered mountains in the distance. We ran upon a schooner which belonged to English missionaries who were praying and working with the natives. We saw a number of the Terra Del Fuegians, and they were not at all attractive. I heard afterward that the Patagonians killed and ate those very missionaries, who were trying to convert them.

We were short of coal, and in going through the straits we had to stop and cut cordwood.

TRIES MINING

I landed in San Francisco after the close of this trip. I had intended to go to Oregon, where I knew a family, one member of which

was a niece of Governor Curry, but it was the time of the great Fraser River gold excitement, and I have never been to Oregon yet. I left the ship and joined the rush for the Fraser River region.

I made my way in a stopsail schooner to Victoria, which was then a Hudson Bay station. I found about 10,000 miners camping there. I also found that the stories of gold were largely false. After working in a store for a while I made my way back to San Francisco as a steerage passenger. There I found Dave Bond, a printer whom I had known in Philadelphia. He told me of work I could get to do at the printer's trade in Frank Eastman's establishment. It did not last very long, and afterward I worked in a rice mill as a weigher.

When this failed I resolved to go to the mines in the interior of the state, and having no other way of reaching them I started out to walk. I was, in fact, what would now be called a tramp. I had a little money, but I slept in barns to save it and had a rough time generally, until finally, I made up my mind to return to San Francisco.

A PRINTER ONCE MORE

When I got back I ran across Bond again, and again went to printing. They paid seventy-five cents a thousand, or \$30 a week then, but as I was still a minor I got only \$12. George Thurston, who is now a captain in the regular army, was my foreman.

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

As soon as I became of age I joined the printers' union and so became entitled to full wages. After that I did first-rate. I worked as a substitute, doing what printers called "subbing," on daily papers. Then I went to work on a paper which Duncan was then editing. I got to be foreman at \$30 a week, and he used my name as his publisher until he sold the paper.

Then I subbed on the dailies until four printers started a little daily paper called the *Journal*. Setting type was the main thing then, as there was no telegraphic news to pay for, and so I was taken into partnership on the payment of a small sum — between \$100 and \$200, if I remember correctly.

I worked trying to found the *Journal* until my clothes were in rags and the toes of my shoes were out. I slept in the office and did the best I could to economise, but finally I ran into debt \$30 for my wash bill. What finally broke us up was the threat of civil war, which created great excitement and made the news which came from the East by pony express an absolute necessity. As we did not have it we were forced out.

It was while in these straits that I first met the lady who is now my wife. Her people did not regard me with favour under the circumstances, and I hardly blame them, but the young lady liked me and promised to marry me. I had nothing, but my friends fixed everything for the wedding, and a boarding-house, where

Henry George

I was acquainted, agreed to credit us for two weeks' board. As soon as we were married my wife and I went there. Next morning I got up at six o'clock and started out to find work on an afternoon paper. I did not get it, but I finally found work on the morning papers and we paid our board.

My next move was to Sacramento, where I worked on the Sacramento *Union* and did well. From Sacramento, I returned to San Francisco and with two other printers started a job office. I came near starving to death, and at one time I was so close to it that I think I should have done so but for the job of printing a few cards which enabled us to buy a little cornmeal. In this darkest time of my life my second child [Richard, the sculptor, now residing in New York] was born. I gave up the job office and went back to subbing, managing to make a living that way until I began writing.

BEGINS WRITING

The first thing I ever wrote for a newspaper was a story sent back to Philadelphia of how we had buried a man who died of yellow fever on the voyage when we were near Montevideo. About this time Lincoln was assassinated, and I wrote an article on it for the *Alta Californian*. They printed it as an editorial and were astonished to find that it came from one of the printers. I became a sort of reporter, but I left that to work as a printer at Sacramento on state

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

work for \$5 a day. There, by the way, I invested my savings in a mining venture and lost them.

On my return to San Francisco I wrote an article for the *Times*, which resulted in my being made news editor, and I afterward became chief editor — a place I held for a year or so. From the *Times* I went over to the *Chronicle*, of which I was managing editor, but I did not like Charles De Young, and I went to the *Herald*. It was a new paper and I came East in its interest. My wife had already come ahead of me to Philadelphia.

This was in 1868, if I do not forget. At any rate, it was just before they had completed the transcontinental railroad, and I crossed the plains in a four-horse "mud waggon." I slept many nights sitting at the driver's side, and I was all the more impressed therefore when we reached the railroad and got a sleeping car. We had to sleep two in a berth, however.

I had come East to make a fight to get the Associated Press dispatches for my paper. They were refused, and the Western Union finally gave orders abrogating an agreement it had made with me. It afterward attempted to keep my matter off the wires. I kept up this fight for the San Francisco *Herald*, both from New York and Philadelphia, until finally the paper got into bad financial straits and I returned to California.

It was during my stay in the East that I wrote for the New York *Tribune* an article

Henry George

headed "The Chinese on the Pacific Coast" — the first article I ever wrote on political economy.

When I returned to San Francisco, I found the *Herald* dying, and as the printers were the only ones on it who could get money to live on, I went to work at the case.

After this I edited the *Oakland Transcript*, and made a friend of Professor Swinton. Governor Haight, who was fighting the Pacific railroad, offered me charge of a Democratic paper, the *Reporter*, and I took it. It prospered and I used the money I made from it in starting a penny paper in San Francisco.

The articles I wrote, supporting Haight in his anti-monopoly fight, attracted attention, and about this time I also developed the idea which was afterward worked out in "Progress and Poverty."

I published it first in a pamphlet called "Our Land and Land Policy," of which a thousand copies were sold at twenty-five cents each. More might have been sold, but when the edition ran out I determined to wait until I could develop the idea in a way I thought more worthy of it.

Our penny paper was printed on a flat press of the old style, and we found we could not get off enough copies to supply the demand or to make it pay. A man was very anxious to buy and we sold to him. One of my partners went to Paris with the proceeds of his venture, but I remained in San Francisco and was finally

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

induced by the purchaser of the paper to take an interest in it for nothing, as he had lost hope of succeeding with it. We got the first Bullock perfecting press ever used in California, but just as we were starting a morning and Sunday edition the Bank of California failed and brought on a disastrous local panic.

WRITES "PROGRESS AND POVERTY"

We were pressed for the money which we had borrowed to buy the press, and the sacrifices we were compelled to make determined me to retire. I held a small political office in San Francisco, by appointment for four years, and during this time wrote "Progress and Poverty."

I could not find a publisher in the East or in England. The publishers laughed at the idea of there being a sale for a work on political economy written in San Francisco. My old partner, W. M. Hinton, who had a printing office in San Francisco, determined to risk it, however, and he printed an edition which sold for \$3 a copy.

In January, 1880, I came East after the Appletons had agreed to republish the book here. I came on borrowed money, and left my family in California, but "Progress and Poverty" was a success from the start. I have no idea how many copies have been sold. I think considerably over half a million. There were three editions in German alone, and there have been editions in Dutch, Swedish, French, Italian

Henry George

and even in Japanese and Chinese. From many of these, of course, I never received anything at all.

[The pages which follow are from "The Life of Henry George," by Henry George, Jr. Copyright, 1900, by Henry George; published by Doubleday, Page & Co., New York.]

A PROPHECY REGARDING "PROGRESS AND POVERTY"

On September 15, 1879, Henry George sent one of the first copies of "Progress and Poverty" to his father, in his eighty-first year. He wrote:

"It is with a deep feeling of gratitude to our Father in Heaven that I send you a printed copy of this book. I am grateful that I have been able to live to write it, and that you have been enabled to live to see it. It represents a great deal of work and a good deal of sacrifice, and now it is done. It will not be recognised at first — maybe not for some time — but it will be ultimately considered a great book, will be published in both hemispheres, and be translated into different languages. This, I know, though neither of us may ever see it here. But the belief I have expressed in this book — the belief that there is yet another life for us — makes that of little moment."

A RESPONSE TO CRITICISM

"Progress and Poverty" was sharply criticised in the *Sacramento Record-Union*. Mr. George responded:

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

“ . . . If I shall seem to show any of that absence of diffidence which you deem one of the marked characteristics of my book, do not charge it to any want of respect or lack of proper modesty, but to the fact, that when a man has so thought out and tested his opinions that they have in his mind the highest certainty, it would be but affectation for him to assume doubts he does not feel. . . .

“For my own part I am not lacking in respect for authority. Like every body else, I am disposed to believe whatever I am told by those reputed wise and learned, and if I have been enabled to emancipate myself from ideas which have fettered far abler men, it is, doubtless, due to the fact that my study of social problems was in a country like this, where they have been presented with peculiar directness, and perhaps also to the fact that I was led to think a great deal before I had a chance to do much reading.”

RELIGION

[TO REV. THOMAS DAWSON, GLENCHREE,
IRELAND]

February 1, 1883.

. . . There is something else I wanted to say to you that I can only write with my own hand. Don't be disturbed because I am not a Catholic. In some things your Church is very attractive to me; in others it is repellent. But I

Henry George

care nothing for creeds. It seems to me that in any church or out of them one may serve the Master, and this also that faith that is the soul of your Church holds. And in my way, in the line that duty has seemed to call me, that I have tried to do. Because you are not only my friend, but a priest and a religious, I shall say something that I don't like to speak of — that I never before have told to any one. Once in daylight, and in a city street, there came to me a thought, a vision, a call — give it what name you please. But every nerve quivered. And there and then I made a vow. Through evil and through good, whatever I have done, and whatever I have left undone, to that I have been true. It was that that impelled me to write "Progress and Poverty," and that sustained me when else I should have failed. And when I had finished the last page, in the dead of night, when I was entirely alone, I flung myself on my knees and wept like a child. The rest was in the Master's hands. That is a feeling that has never left me; that is constantly with me. And it has led me up and up. It has made me a better and a purer man. It has been to me a religion, strong and deep, though vague — a religion of which I never like to speak, or make any outward manifestation, but yet that I try to follow. Believe this, my dear father, that if it be God's will that I should be a Catholic, He will call me to it. But in many different ways, and in many different forms men may

Little Masterpieces of Autobiography

serve Him. . . . each in the station to which he has been called, let us do what is set us, and we shall not clash. From various instruments, set to different keys, comes the grand harmony. and when you remember me in your prayers, which I trust you sometimes will, do not ask that I shall be this or that, but only for grace, and guidance, and strength to the end.

THE HUSBAND-LOVER

[TO HIS WIFE]

October 12, 1883.

It is twenty-three years ago to-night since we first met — I only a month or two older than Harry (his son), and you not much older than our Jen (his daughter). For twenty-three years we have been closer to each other than to any one else in the world, and I think we esteem each other more and love one another better than when we first began to love. You are now "fair, fat and forty," and to me the mature woman is handsomer and more lovable than the slip of a girl whom twenty-three years ago I met without knowing that my life was to be bound up with hers. We are not rich, so poor just now, in fact, that all I can give you on this anniversary is a little love letter; but there is no one we can afford to envy, and in each other's love we have what no wealth can compensate for. And so let us go on, true and loving,

Henry George

trusting in Him to carry us farther who has brought us so far with so little to regret. For twenty-three years you have been mine, and I have been yours, and though twenty-three years your husband, I am more than ever your lover.