

LETTERS

TO

YOUNG LADIES.

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BY MRS. L. H. SIGOURNEY.

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"Every sort of useful knowledge should be imparted to the young, not merely for its own sake, but also for the sake of its subserviency to higher things."

MRS. HANNAH MORE.

SECOND EDITION.

Hartford.

WILLIAM WATSON.

1835.

should be freely given, with the reasons for such variation, and the discussions which arise, will both serve to fix knowledge firmly in the memory, and aid in forming a correct judgment of the character and deeds of those, whom History has embalmed. If to read each, of the same era or people, produces monotony, the history of different nations may be studied, or one can pursue a course of biography, another of mental philosophy, the natural sciences, or theology, and thus vary the mental banquet. From this partnership in knowledge, great increase of intellectual wealth will be derived, while your subjects of thought and conversation will be perceptibly elevated. “*The elevation of the mind,*” says Burke, “ought to be the principal end of all our studies: which, if they do not in some measure effect, they are of very little service to us.”

Books, as a species of property, seem to be often incorrectly estimated. They are borrowed and injured without compunction, borrowed and not returned, and still the conscience is at rest. The owner may sustain inconvenience by waiting, or damage by loss, but the depredator is unmoved. If a young

lady borrows a shawl or an umbrella in a shower, she returns them without injury; if she takes the loan of a dollar from her friend's purse, she repays it promptly. But a book from her library, she may be months in reading, or in not reading; may abuse, and see abused, or not restore at all, unless the owner take the trouble to claim it. Why are the treasures of Genius, less regarded than the silk-worm's web? and why is it dishonest to steal a dollar, and honest to detain, deface, or destroy a book worth twice that sum?

I have known a kind-hearted owner of books, who prized literary property as it ought to be prized, persist in lending to careless persons, who continued tenaciously to retain possession, till at length she would be forced to go and "gather together her dispersed, that were scattered abroad." To collect and identify them was no slight labor, but patiently would she search book-shelf, sofa and work-basket, and return loaded with her recovered treasures, like a shepherd bringing stray sheep from the wilderness.

I would have books treated with reverence. I cannot bear to see even a child spoil the spelling-book from which it has learned the

alphabet. It savors of ingratitude to a benefactor. Were the books of children composed of better materials, and executed in a more tasteful style, the habit of preserving them would doubtless be earlier and more faithfully inculcated. A sort of sacredness seems to attach itself even to the *page*, on which knowledge has impressed its lineaments, and the cover which protects it from defilement, and from the atmosphere. "Every child," says Dr. Dwight, in his theology, "should be taught to pay all his debts, and to fulfil all his contracts, exactly in the manner, completely in the value, punctually at the time. Every thing which he has borrowed, he should be obliged to return, uninjured, at the time specified, and every thing belonging to others, which he has lost, he should be required to replace." Would that this excellent principle were wrought in with the basis of female education.

And now, dear young ladies, let me release you from this long dissertation upon books, after I have commended them to your intimacy as *friends*, safe, accessible, instructive, never encroaching, and never offended at the neg-

lect of any point of etiquette. Can this be said of all your associates?

When intercourse with living becomes irksome, or insipid, summon to your side the departed spirits of the mighty dead. Would you think it an honor to be introduced into the presence of princes and prelates, or to listen to the voice of Plato or Socrates? Close the door of your reading-room, and they congregate around you. Yea, a *greater than Socrates* will be there, if you ponder his words, with an humble and teachable soul. If trifles have disturbed you during the day, sages will admonish you of the serenity and dignity which ought to characterize the immortal mind.

Has ambition deluded you? the fallen monarch will show you the vanity of adulation, and the hollowness of all human glory. Are you out of spirits? the melody of the poet shall soothe you, and do for you, what the harp of David did for the moodiness of Saul. Has friendship grieved you? *They* offer you consolation, on whose virtues Death has stamped the seal, *never to change*. *Make friendship with the illustrious dead*. Your slightest wish, as a talisman, will gather from distant

climes, and remote ages, those who can satisfy the thirst of the mind, from the deepest fountains of knowledge.

*One volume* there is, whose spirit can heal the wounded heart. When it sorrows for its own infirmities, and for the unsatisfying nature of earth's vaunted pleasures, the voice of prophets and apostles, lifted up from its inspired pages, teaches the way to that world "where is fulness of joy, and pleasures forevermore."

Let me close in the eloquent words of the author of "Lectures to Young Men." "This book, the eldest surviving offspring of the human intellect, the chosen companion of Patriarchs, Prophets, Apostles, and of all the wisest and best men who have ever lived; this book that reveals to us the character and will of our great Creator, and final Judge; that opens for us the way of salvation through a Redeemer; unveils to our view the invisible world, and shows us the final destiny of our race; this book which God has given, expressly to teach us our character, our duty, and our prospects, which has conducted to heaven all who have reached that happy world, and must conduct us thither, if ever we attain to its blessedness;