

## Editor's Easy Chair.

ONE cannot have followed the course of recent public comment without noting the interest, mounting almost to anxiety, in the question of what shall be done with our multi-millionaires, or what they shall do with themselves. The republic is not ripe yet, apparently, for a leisure class, but with the *subiti guadagni* of all sorts, which form its most impressive fact, a very large leisure class has arisen, and is tasking our best energies for its assimilation. What, in a nation of hard workers, shall it do, can it do? That is what the class itself asks us, not only tacitly, but sometimes in so many words; for the most remarkable characteristic of our leisure class is its apparent dissatisfaction with itself. In other communities, where the leisure class has, as it were, grown up with the country, it is troubled with no such misgivings. The drones there are proud and happy, with the sovereign in their special charge, and consequently the general welfare; for by the theory which prevails in the greater part of the world, it is through the sovereign that all the divine blessings flow by carefully graduated falls to the nobility, gentry, middle and lower middle classes, down to the masses at the bottom. But here the drones have no such office of guardians or conduits to perform. They are themselves at the top of earthly things, though they have evidently had no sign yet from the Deity that He has any particular use for them there. A plaint has more than once gone up from our leisure class that it has nothing to do,—quite as if that were not just what it was here for,—and that its leisure seems to take the meaning out of life. As we poor working-bees are given to understand, neither villas nor yachts, nor horses nor automobiles, nor dining and being dined, nor going to Europe and coming back, quite fill up the gulf which the over-rich feel yawning in them. The old suggestion to sell all they have and give unto the poor, and turn and follow its Author, has always been felt to be impracticable. No rich man in our time has even tried to do that but Count

Tolstoy, and the Countess Tolstoy has wisely seen to it that he did not do it. The plaint of the idle rich cannot be met with this precept as if it were the answer to their melancholy conundrum, and it is doubtful if anything more than a study of their problem can be offered by the observer who regards them with the most affectionate desire to help them.

### I

The first point in the condition of the idle rich which takes the eye of the student is that they are the victims of circumstances. Like the idle poor, the idle rich suffer because there is nothing for them to do, but the greater hardship of the idle rich lies in the fact that they do not seem fit to do anything. Some philosophers have supposed that their leisure qualified them to take charge of the political and economical affairs of people who were at work, and there has been a good deal of polite regret among us that up to the present time there has been no more zeal in the people at work than there has been an apparent purpose of Providence to turn our leisure class to account in this way. We have seen that under other systems they are turned to account in this way; but their conduct of public business under these systems has not convinced us. It seems to have been mainly in their own interest, with few escapes from the vicious circle which forms the logic of their lives; it seems to have tended always to the perpetuation of that leisure class which, it was philosophized, their public employment would practically put an end to.

Another notion has been that they could be used as leaders on such public occasions as have a society complexion, and that they could profitably put themselves in the van of the Better Element when it enters upon one of its crusades. They may actually head such a movement at the outset, or seem to head it, but, like Mark Twain's tourists who advanced to meet the Bedouins, they sooner or later turn up in the rear, or drop out of sight altogether. They do not even serve the poor use of princes

in laying corner-stones, or receiving official addresses. Which of them presses the electric button that starts the machinery at industrial exhibitions? How much do they contribute to culture?

It is imaginable that having enjoyed, or suffered, a liberal education, they would turn their minds to literature, and excel, say, in history, which is the most expensive province of the republic of letters, and the oftenest resorted to by persons of independent property. But as yet our multi-millionaires have not written a single history, and what two or three of them have done in the sister realm of romance has not been the kind of thing to make us wish any of them would do more. They collect books as they collect pictures, but they write the one as little as they paint the other. Possibly they read books, though it is doubtful; for if by a flattering chance you are ever thrown in their company, you find their literary opinions mostly second hand, or, when first hand, second rate.

Probably they do not read themselves, but have their reading done for them, as they have their good works done for them, when they are of a benevolent mind. An almoner is quite as indispensable to a charitable millionaire as to a prince, for the people who wish to prey upon him, to make him their means, are many, and alert for every unguarded moment. It is his purpose, of course, to help only the deserving poor, and the undeserving are so skilled in the arts of deceit that a sort of detective is necessary to him when, as not often happens, he would part his cloak with a beggar. Mostly, he leaves that sort of thing to St. Martin, for if he has a conscience against anything, it is against pauperizing beggars. With nothing to do, and with the longing to do something, you would think he would give his time to charity, if he finds any pleasure in it, and would be his own almoner, his own detective. But if he did, he would have no leisure.

The trouble is, the rich man has been taught to expect too much of himself, and makes demands upon human nature in his own case which it would be inhuman in another to second. In far the greater number of instances he has

made his own money, and has really fulfilled his office in the world. It is his peculiar misfortune to be now and here so posited in time and place that he lives on after he really has nothing more to do. In former times and other places he was his whole life long in getting over-rich, and had only a moment at the end for making his peace with God, as it was called, and going to his reward. But now he survives his sole use, and remains to cumber the earth, a dead body of extinct activities, to fester and corrupt, and spread a pestilence of envy and covetousness and discontent, as far as the fame of his riches can reach. It is no wonder that in most instances he cannot cease from gain, but keeps on and on, heaping up wealth which the wildest prodigality could hardly waste. Even when he wills to work no longer, his wealth works for him, and when it has reached a certain sum, defies him to arrest its increase. Worse than this, the man who has not made money from the love of it, and yet has made money immeasurably and irremediably, infects more selfish money-makers with the superstition that they are somehow the instruments of Providence, and that they are doing God's will in grabbing everything in sight, and keeping it. They have their logic, and if you once grant their premises, you must grant their conclusions. But their greed is really rarer than the vain ideal of the man who means somehow to give again what he has got, and has flattered himself he was getting for the good of others.

## II

There are probably few millionaires who have not their moments of misgiving for themselves, or are not troubled for those who are to inherit their wealth. It is imaginable of most of the over-rich, whom we like so much better to imagine worse things of, that they are not easy in their minds as to the transmission of the intolerable idleness which is the corollary of immeasurable riches. It is credible that they give much earnest thought as to how the means shall be kept and the end averted, and this Chair would be the last movable to think scorn of their hopeless plight.

Their devices are superficially of the

kind of things that work quite well in other circumstances than theirs. They fancy teaching their children habits of frugality and industry, and as long as the children are little and unspotted of the world, they obey that teaching. The Easy Chair has known of some rich mothers who made their girls help somewhat about the house-work, and their boys shovel the snow from the steps. This was in a simpler and austerer order of things, subject to an elder tradition of plainer living and higher thinking than prevails in Fifth Avenue and the Millionaire Blocks on the East Side next the Park, but still it did not work. It could not found the sort of character which those admirable mothers hoped to see reproduced in their children. As soon as these came to the knowledge of economical good and evil, they perceived that they were the victims of a pious fraud, and that they were made, in an innocent insincerity, to do the things which were justly the part of those who did them in submission to a law inapplicable to themselves. For themselves, this law really read, "Not in the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread," and so, as soon as they dared, they did those things no longer.

They were quite right. One need not be so banal as to point out that if the over-rich do the work of the over-poor, they keep the bread out of mouths where the sweat of the brow would rightfully put it; it is sufficient to say that a virtue dishonestly come by is the worst of vices. Then, is the sort of virtue which those admirable mothers aimed at quite beyond the hopes of their children? Quite, the Easy Chair would say, with the most Rhadamanthine of its frowns. This is a world in which the difficulty of carrying water on both shoulders is one of the most humiliating of the facts that inexorably condition us. But what, then, is the remedy of an ill so deplorable? For all human ills there must be a remedy; where there is so much will, surely there must be a way. Experience does not teach this invariably, but the universal longing of mankind is not cast into proverbial form without some reason, and probably truth as well as hope lurks in these sayings. What, then, is the truth? It may be that if you will begin far back

enough, you will catch up and pass by the evil that seems to outrun the good intent. But it is not practicable to begin with one's ancestry, and regenerate one's grandfathers, so that one's grandsons shall have the right sort of heredity; and those admirable mothers were doing the next best thing, and trying to regenerate their children. They trusted, not ignobly, that if their children did the labors of the poor, they would have their virtues; but they trusted vainly. What they could have reasonably expected to do was to give their children higher and purer ideals than those which had made them rich men's sons and daughters. They could have taught them by the example of exalted lives that the things which money can buy are not the precious things, and that the riches which their fathers held so dear were not worth what they had cost; that they had the malign force to make self-denial a mockery, and plain living and high thinking a comic masque for their possessor. They could have shown the little ones, whom they wished to make wise and good, through a share of the labor which the Supreme Wisdom and Goodness ordained for every creature, that money makes money of itself, and nothing but eternal vigilance could guard them from increasing opulence and indolence. They could point out that there is no greater fallacy than the American superstition of three generations from shirt sleeves to shirt sleeves. They could have summoned every prominent, and nearly every historic, family in the country to prove that it is hardly three generations from shirt sleeves to sleeves of cloth of gold, and from the tow smock to the stomacher embroidered in pearls, with the expectation of any richer apparel which

Luxury, straining her low thought,

could invent for the fourth and fifth generations. If riches ever had wings, they have now been clipped, or adapted to carrying their owner securely as long as he likes, and wherever he wishes to go.

### III

For those who are presently rich, either by acquisition or inheritance, it seems hard to realize that the high ideals are possible only in the difficult providence

with which all things are possible. But if this fact is disheartening, there is another fact which may well buoy us up against despair. After all, the over-rich, though they own so much more of the commonwealth than they ought, are very few beside the great numbers of the over-poor, or even the moderately moneyed. They are the millionaires, but they are not the millions, and it is to the millions that one may turn with the lively expectation of interesting their children in the ideals so all but impossible to the children of the millionaires. The children of the millions may hopefully be asked to consider whether there are not better things than the things that money can buy, and whether it is not wiser to spend one's life for these than for the things within reach of the every-day dollar. For there is something very distinguished in the more precious things, something personal, something inalienable, something imperishable, in what is unpurchasable; and the world has lately been offered an impressive lesson to this effect in a book which we can here regard in one aspect only. This book is the biography of James Russell Lowell, which Mr. Horace E. Scudder imagined so well that he has made it, as it were, a plate of clear glass, through which the poet may be seen, in the great, essential things, as he was to the knowledge of those who knew him in life. The glass is not without its flaws; it is not without that coloring of the artist's nature which cannot be kept out of the artist's work; it is written here and there, with the twists that were in his own mind; here and there a bit of decoration interrupts or obscures; the whole has the limitations of his thinking and feeling; but the work is most conscientious, the intention is singularly free of selfish literary ambition, and the result is a transparency which leaves in the beholder a lessening sense of any barrier. The author has told the story of Lowell's life in such a way as to make it continuously interesting, but he has done it so that it seems to tell itself, and to leave us at last in an illusion of the very presence of the man, with his little imperfections in the true proportion to his great perfections. One may well believe this a true portrait of one who failed in so few of the things that exalt

living; whose soul was very noble and pure; whose mind was bent mainly upon the humanities, but was always at the service of humanity; who was sublimely unhappy in his turn through the sorrows that befall every one, but always at peace in the freedom from mean motives, from the remorse of selfish aims, and the shame of vulgar success.

Perhaps it was because we had been thinking much and compassionately of the hard lot of those rich men who do not know what to do with themselves that the lesson of Lowell's life seemed to be one that we could wholly commend to those who wish to escape their vain regrets. The rich, indeed, cannot escape them, and hardly their children, such is the malign strength and inexorable force of riches; but many who are now poor, and are in danger of becoming millionaires by the misapplication of their powers, may be hopefully invited to learn from Lowell's life how to live all their days in a usefulness that shall long outlast their days. He was not born to the poverty that most men know, even most literary men, but the ease in which at the best he lived was never affluence, and it never was entire ease; it never was free from the anxiety of those who have wholly or partly to make their living. Sometimes his support, with his will or against it, was scarcely more than meagre, and almost to the end he was doing something to earn his bread. He had a high reverence for law, and he did not try to shirk the holiest and highest law, that which bids us eat our bread in the sweat of our brows, though probably no man would have found leisure sweeter, or better known how to keep it from being bitter. In his early years, when he vowed himself to the service of the slave, he gave freely of his brains and means, and never at any period did a good cause lack his help in either. One reads with amaze of his simple ambition in the way of money, with pathos of his experience in things that were almost poverty. One year he hoped to earn four hundred dollars and to live on it. Like Agassiz, he had no time to make money, and hardly to look after what had been left him. He was sometimes cramped by losses, and he could not give up his professorship, when he would have chosen to teach in

a larger way, because he needed his salary. He missed his salary when he went abroad, not for rest, but for wider work; and when the country honored itself in making him its representative abroad, he freely spent his own little income with his official pay, that his country might not suffer the ignominy that it merited. He did better than this; he exalted it by his character, and defended its shabbiness against the logic of those who censured it. When he came home an old man, he still worked and hoped to work, not that he might make money, but that he might earn a little for those who were dearer to him than himself. At the end of his days, which no misfortune could keep from being beautiful and glorious, he was as poor as when they began.

#### IV

Is this, then, the sort of life which the Easy Chair holds up for an example to the rising generation? Quite the sort of life, if the rising generation wishes to take warning rather than example by those rich men who cannot do anything with themselves. If you wish to do something with yourself, you must begin early and keep on late, and you must be very careful that anything done for yourself shall be the incident, not the aim of your endeavor. That seems to be the law, for otherwise you become successful in the low worldly sense, and condemn yourself to the fruition that the rich find so unsatisfying. If your ideal is riches, the money you make will become so precious to you that you either cannot bear to rid yourself of it, or if you give it, you will give it with a sense of it far beyond its real value, and will wish to be known for having given it. You will wish to be remembered as a millionaire philanthropist, or some such lamentable thing; and if you keep your wealth to buy honor and pleasure, you will do a thing equally vain. No man was ever yet honored for his riches, however courted and flattered he may have been. If you like envy and hate and greed in those who come near you, or try to come near you, money will buy you these, and plenty of them. But they will scarcely be a pleasure, as any rich man will tell you, if you take

him in one of those moments when his mask is off. Money will buy fine houses, yachts, pictures, *éditions de luxe*, horses, automobiles, balls, dinners, but if you have made the money, it cannot buy you joy in them, and if you have inherited the money, use will have blighted the joy of them, so that they will be to you as if they were not. A rich man may dream of living unselfishly, simply, the brother and the equal of other men, but he cannot. The rich are impelled to live as they do by the subtle and mystical forces which oblige men to be of their condition, and forbid them to declass themselves. There is no sane man of the average intelligence who, if he had it put clearly before him, would not prefer the life of Lowell to the lot of the richest man in America. Here, again, it may appear that the choice is not free, and that without Lowell's gifts the life of Lowell cannot be lived. That is true, but it is not true that his motives are impossible to those who begin soon enough. They need not begin with their grandfathers; they can begin with themselves. To obey such motives will not be so easy as making money; that cannot be promised; but it may be promised that in the humblest instances the result will be prouder. To be past the fear of want, that is an essential condition of happiness; but to be beyond the chance of work, which is the right and the duty of all, is the supreme misery, the very image of perdition. Perhaps something like this perdition, beginning on the earth, was an implication of the saying that the rich man shall hardly enter the kingdom of heaven. He is not sinful beyond other men; many poor men are great sinners; but he can find nothing to do, and to be idle is to be far from bliss. Some work, in which you shall lose yourself, work for its own sake, for others' sake, that is the lesson of Lowell's life, that is the true good of life. There is no pleasure but in resting from work, except resting *in* work, which is rapture beyond the dreams of sainthood. But this is what the millionaires complain is denied them, and it is to win this that we urge upon those who are yet young not to become millionaires if they can help it.



## Editor's Study.

THERE is an evolution of biography, a progressive development, that during the last century is as discernible as that of fiction. It has become an art quite distinct from that which dominates Clio's proper realm. It is true that many important histories have taken the guise of biographies—as in Hay and Nicolay's *Lincoln*, and, in like cases, where the subject of biography has been the central figure in a critical period of a nation's or of the world's history. But, even dealing with such central figures—Caesar, Napoleon, Washington, Lincoln—the biographic art may be, and is, at its best when it is so exercised as to maintain its distinction, disowning the historic aim and scope.

### I

It is a modern distinction. There was among the tuneful Nine no separate Muse of Biography. The story of the leader was in early times the story of his people. In a more complex civilization, as of the mature Greece or Rome, and of the modern Western nations, there are many eminent personalities besides military or political leaders. Yet in ancient classical literature the biographies of such men—philosophers, lawgivers, artists, and poets—are crude and meagre. The martyrdom of Socrates helped to give him especial notice in Xenophon's reminiscences, but the *Memorabilia* is, after all, only a sketch; and we should know very little of the private life of Marcus Aurelius if he had not been himself an author, disposed to introspection and autobiographic reminiscence. Only men of affairs were considered worthy of elaborate memoirs; and their private lives were only slightly sketched, or, when more than this was attempted, the matter was trivial, as in the pages which Suetonius devotes to the domestic affairs of the Caesars.

When the man's life is mainly *afeld*—*foris*, as the Latins expressed it (whence are derived *foreigner*, *forest*, etc.)—in camp or forum, a thing open and of the daylight; when the individual is merged

in the mass, the highest ambition possible having relation only to that collectivity—to be its leader or sage—then record is made of deeds only (the *res gesta*), and biography is mainly a matter of anecdote. Individualism belongs to the reflective period, when man ceases to be to himself a *non-intime*, when he courts solitude and reclusion, and night for him seems made not for sleep only.

In the maturity of this reflection was developed the habit of letter-writing as a means of individual expression, a habit which had its own culture along with that of the intellect and of those emotions which are the basis of friendship, romance, and domestic happiness. The correspondence between Cicero and Atticus is a good index of the best Roman social culture, while at the same time its constant allusion to public affairs made it indispensable to Froude in his sketch of Julius Caesar.

In our modern life, diaries and private correspondence play a more important part for biographical uses. Good as was Lockhart's life of Sir Walter Scott, the latter's letters recently published constitute an almost wholly new biography.

Diaries like that of Amiel or of Eugénie de Guérin, and recorded confessions like those of Rousseau, show the writer as he would like to appear to the world, and we suspect a disguise in his self-portraiture, however frank and sincere he may seem to himself to be; but even thus the record has interest. Much more interesting as well as more truthful is the view given by the diarist of contemporaneous life, men, and affairs. Pepys will be of fresh interest to every new generation as long as the English language is read. The recent autobiography of W. J. Stillman is replete with contemporaneous portraiture. But for the purposes of biography the letters of a man of distinction, having important personal contacts, especially if he has insight and the faculty of expression, hold the first place. They are *unconscious* autobiography.