Thesis

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"Books That Help and Books That Hinder."
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"In one sense," says Andrew Lang, "there are no books that do not help a man, add to another, it may be doubted whether any books help him at all. He need not say that every book that can be read will please, amuse, interest, divert, or at least occupy the time, and in that sense is helpful; but he does not think any book excepting the sacred literature can be of any help in the great problems of life, except by way of sympathy. Marcus Aurelius himself, he declares, can say no more than to "endure and abstain." Books cannot give us courage, strength of character, and patience, endure; they cannot make us grieve the lesser wrong the more except by the comforting quality, sympathy, or the force of example.

But can anything except God himself give us more than this? Our joys, our griefs are found alone to experience; in ourselves alone must be the strength and pain; with the sympathy of friends to sustain, with the example of others to point out the way, and with God's help, to fight to fight the battles of life and conquer, or else life must be a failure so far as we are concerned. The sad or there are books and books; and the bad ones, alas are much more numerous than the good. There are many more which are what
Emerson calls "mental" and do nothing for us. I think it is Robert Collyer who said, "There are books beyond numbering which authors and publishers should advertise," as I noticed a man in Denver advertising his soda fountain, as "sweetened wind."

But there are good books accessible to everybody, and quite as essential to one's higher life as are food and clothing to his physical nature, or friends to his social nature. And, in the truest sense of the word, they are friends. Goldsmith says, "The first time I read a good book it is as if I gained a friend." Emerson, that wise, deep thinker, says, "There are books which are of that importance in a man's private experience, as to verify for him the fables of Cornelius Agrippus, of Michael Scott, or of the old Orphians of Thrace — books which take rank in our lives with parents and lovers and passionate experiences, so authoritative — books which are the work and the proof of so comprehensive, so nearly, equal to the world which they paint, that though one shuts them with meaner ones, he feels this exclusion from them to accuse his way of living."

"This advice is, never read a book not a year old."

"Never read any but famed authors, and never read any but what you like."

With children, we notice how much...
stranger an impression of wrong doing and idleness of perseverance and endurance is made in their minds by means of the story. The care of making the good done by "Hans Andersen's Fairy Tales" "Mother Goose Rhymes" and "Aesop's Fables" how much quicker the truths are grasped, and I think in most cases the lessons they teach are longer remembered, in this way, are the foundations for many strong moral characters laid. As the child grows older the tales of Mother Goose, but will find an interesting and helpful study in "What Katy Did", "What Katy Did at School", and "What Katy Did next", and in fighting Tom Brown's battles. Miss Alcott also steps forward with her wise counsel so charmingly given, and Mrs. Whitney gives us much good advice. Do we not all feel strongest and better for having wandered with Julia Reed through many mistakes and mistaking ideas to a more true knight of the strong Christian character? Then comes Wickham with his quaint humor and his truthful exaggerations. How we love and despise the cruel wickedness of Squeers, the more intelligent but no less sinful meekness of Ralph Nickleby, the treacherous scheming of Uriah, and the perfidious hypocrisy of! One cannot but suffer with their victims, and fight their battles with them; and thus the lesson becomes real to us, "When I am reading a book," says
Dear Swift: it seems to be alive and talking to me, and
I am sure there is no one who enjoys reading Dickens
who does not feel an ambition to build this charactertistically,
and unselfishly use his powers in making society better.

But a book may be the means of warp-
ing one's character, distorting his views, and giving him
false ideas of life and its great truths. As Charles Dickens says,
"Even Emerson's essay on 'Compensation' has failed to restore
to me the full meaning of all that I lost through the
Heir of Redclyffe." This destroyed the doctrine that virtue
is its own reward for me. That in the end all will be
right for those who do right. She also writes of Davenport
and Mortimer as giving her a false impression of life,
although there were apparently no harms to the local.

But for the first time, she declares, my soul revolted from
the pretentious virtues of honest poverty. It is to the
malign influence of that tale that I owe my sneaking
preference for the heroes and butterflies of earth. I
cannot even sympathize with the noble theory that every
man and woman should do their share of the world's
work. I would think my own if I could. Then some books
really good in themselves, are at times, a
hindrance. For instance, books beyond one or books
distasteful to one, and if forced upon a person, they miss
all the good, and instead get much harm. Imagine
the harm that may be done by forcing a student.
just entering their teens to read Bacon, Milton, even Shakespeare. Shakespeare says,

"No profit grows where is no pleasure taken.
In brief, sir, study what you must effect.
But the mission of books is not
confined to ministration to our moral and social nature,
but has also a much wider field of labor. A few books
there are which, if utilized to their utmost capacity,
would furnish a most thorough education in themselves.
Such as the works of the early Greek writers, or the more
modern Bacon and Shakespeare. It has been said of
Shakespeare that the best proof of his vitality is the
crowd of writers which suddenly broke into that
field; and of Chaucer that one is Jehovahed with the
persuasion which feeds so many penitentiaries. Their power
lies in the fact that they understood human
nature so well, and proceed in such great degree
the faculty of telling others what they see. But you
imagine me of things around us in the world. I have
chosen a certain number which they grasped thoroughly
and presented them to us in the form best calculated
to enable us to grasp it also, and to grasp it with delight.

Jerome, while viewing by his fireside,
solves some of the greatest problems of life. In Sueton
"They" every word is fraught with meaning, and so
well chosen that no other word could express the
thought so well. It is said Gray was seven years in
writing this little poem. He pondered for more than
three months for one word and finally the word
flashed on his mind so suddenly that he took time to
record it from the book. This was the
word plods. Emerson gives us some of the most profound
truths in essays only a few pages in length. Ruskin
takes us with him in his travels and through his
eyes we see the sublime beauty of his beloved mountain
its flowers, its streams and their falls, and even grass
is endowed with the grandest of beauty when looked
at with this great artist's insight.

There is still a higher scope of work
for both, and that is their effect on our ideal natures
and I think Longfellow found the golden key which
unlocks the door to the ideal world and gives us a
glimpse of what highest endeavor may sustain.
How we love him for the sympathy he expresses and
the encouragement he gives us. How something his
"Psalm of Life" and his "Bridge"! Lowell's "Vision of Sir
Daunfel" should also be a vision for us. I pause in
the most beautiful of language, pictures the strip
in earth between good and evil, showing the beauty
of goodness and its final triumph. Bunyan though
only a poor ignorant parson has been able to give us
one of the grandest works on the Christian life, ever
written in the English language; and so straight-forward that a child can understand it.

Browning in a little poem on death shows such willingness to fight life's battles in order to gain life's reward, that one cannot but feel the grandeur of such a character. Milton, that grand, sublime, mysterious, poet by his wonderful power, has been able to show us the awful horrors of Hades, the splendor of Heaven, and the loveliness of Paradise with a vividness which none one has termed superhuman, and riveting memory itself. But, and far more precious than all the rest, comes the Bible, whose divine power and influence is so well known and felt that it would be useless and beyond my power to attempt to tell of it.

In conclusion then, let me quote the advice of Emerson, found in the following paragraph.

"Be sure, then, to read no inferior books. Shun the spume of the press in the grasp of the hour. Do not read what you shall desire, without asking, in the street and the train. Mr. Johnson said he always went into stately shops and good travelers stop at the best hotels; for though they cost more they do not cost much more, and there is the good company and the best information. In like manner, the student knows that the fancied
books contain, first and last, the best thoughts and facts. Now and then, by rarest luck, in some foolish bomb street is the gem we want. But in the best circles is the best information. If you should transfer the amount of your reading day by day from the newspaper to the standard authors—But who dare speak of such a thing?