

COUNSELS:

TO

YOUNG MEN:

For IN A LETTER, *Samuel*

FROM

A FATHER

TO

HIS SON.

*It is the man that findeth wisdom, and the
that getteth understanding. Prov. iii & 13.*

STIRLING:

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COUNSELS

TO

YOUNG MEN

*All youth, set right at first, with ease go on,
And each new task is with new pleasure done,
But if neglected till they grow in years,
And each fond mother, her dear darling spoils,
Error becomes habitual, and you'll find,
'Tis then hard labour to reform the mind.*

THE point of life at which you are arrived, is a very interesting one; I trust you feel that it is so. I should have a much lower opinion both of your understanding and your heart, that I am inclined to entertain, if I could suppose you to be so much affected with the emotions on leaving a father's house, so dearly to you by so many pleasing recollections, and entering upon a new life, in which you have so many important interests depending

The present my dear son, is to you a serious moment. It calls upon you to reflect, to deliberate, & to resolve. Looking forth, as you are, into the wide world, where you must rely for

on your own judgement, prudence, and
 mness, much more than upon the wisdom
 kindness of others; where every thing
 ll depend upon your judging rightly and
 ting well: you should now make it your
 it business to fix upon such a plan of con-
 ct, as you may pursue with security and
 vantage through the remainder of your

Education and example have already
 ight you to love virtue, habit has inclin-
 you to revere her authority and obey her
 ws; and you set out in life with a happy
 s towards that which is right and good,
 d fruit too with a determined purpose
 adhere to it as long as you live: but in
 to render you steady and inflexible
 your good resolutions it is necessary that
 u should be apprized of some difficulties,
 d warned of some hazards, which you
 it expect to meet with; and in order to
 ist you in making the greatest advantage
 your talents and opportunities: it may be
 use to furnish you with certain rules or
 cepts for your direction in the conduct
 life. The COUNSELS which I intend to
 er you will, therefore, be naturally
 fied under the two general heads of
 UTION and ADVICE: caution, with respect
 things which are to be avoided, advice,
 b respect to things which are to be
 RSUED.

The first caution which I shall give is this: *Be not easily persuaded to abandon your principles.* It is not my intention this caution to discourage you in the inquiry after truth; principles which not bear examining, are not worth retaining. It is the indispensable duty, as well as the unalienable right of every rational being to "prove all things," that he may, in result, "hold fast that which is good." Review, as accurately as you have opportunity, the grounds of those religious and moral principles in which you have been educated; examine all opinions, discuss questions, as freely as you please. Perfect freedom is the birth-right of man: a Heaven forbid, that any human authority should infringe or restrain it! But in the exercise of this right, be modest and discreet. If the principles, which in the course of your education you have embraced, have appeared to you supported by solid arguments and satisfactory evidence, continue to regard them as true, till arguments more solid, and evidence more satisfactory, the other side, oblige you to relinquish them; and before you part with any article of your creed, be very certain that you not mistake ridicule or sophistry for sound reasoning.

My next caution is: *Be not ashamed of your principles, nor afraid to follow the*

Silence is, to a certain degree, an amiable
 quality in young people. As far as it
 implies distrust of their own powers in diffi-
 cult undertakings, or of their own under-
 standings in doubtful questions, it is a plea-
 sing proof of modesty: but it is carried to
 culpable excess when it leads them to a
 cowardly detestation of truth and virtue.
 When a young man dares not avow his
 reverence for religion, or his respect for
 decorum in the presence of the licentious
 and profligate; when instead of asserting
 his principles with firmness, he preserves a
 timid and disgraceful silence, whilst he
 hears them disclaimed and ridiculed; still
 more, when he yields to the current, so far
 as to join in the prophan language, and
 partake of the guilty practices of his com-
 panions; modesty degenerates into false de-
 cency and criminal shame. Do not ima-
 gine that such base compliances can be
 justified or excused, on the plea of civility
 and good breeding. The principles which
 your reason and judgement approve, avow
 them boldly, and adhere to them steadfastly;
 nor let any false notions of honour, or pitiful
 ambition of shinning ever entice you to
 forsake them. Do what you judge to be
 right, whatever others may think of you;
 and learn to despise alike, the praise and the
 censure of bad men.]

Let me caution you, in the next place
*Not to suffer yourself to be imposed upon
 false appearances of pleasure* A young
 man, when he first escapes from the eye
 of his parents, and is set free from the shackles
 of authority, is apt to imagine that flowers
 of delight will spring up under his feet
 wherever he goes, and is loth to believe
 possible, that he can rove into any path
 where he will tread upon thorns. He gives
 an easy credit to every flattering promise
 of enjoyment, and fancies that he sees hap-
 piness under every form of pleasure. All
 the fond dreams which are produced in his
 own deluded imagination, are too often
 fostered by the artful sophistry of liberti-
 nian deceivers: who endeavour to persuade him
 that the limitations prescribed to the indul-
 gence of appetite, by the laws of God, and
 the institutions of society, are severe and
 unnecessary restraints, and that he is the wis-
 est and happiest man, who soonest emancipates
 himself from the prejudices of education
 and gives the freest scope to his inclinations.
 Believe me, my son, or rather believe the
 testimony of universal experience when you
 are assured, that the fair promises of licen-
 tious pleasure are fallacious, and that every
 expectation you may entertain of happiness
 beyond the boundary of virtue, will inevi-
 tably disappoint you. In order to convince
 yourself of this, without making the danger-

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Experiment, you need only recollect
plain maxim, that where there is, on
whole, more pain than pleasure, there
is no happiness. By observing what is
going in the world, inform yourself whether
it is not too certain to admit of dispute,
that licentious and criminal pleasure is na-
turally productive of infamy, disease, po-
verty, and remorse to the immediate trans-
fers; that it tends to the entire annihila-
tion of all the domestic affections; and
that it introduces endless disorder and con-
fusion into civil society. If you find all this
to be true, and you need not look far
to convince you that it is so,—you
will acknowledge that moralists and precep-
tists have some reason for inveighing against
licentious pleasure; and you will be sen-
sible that parents who love their children
will find some occasion for solicitude, that they
may be preserved from so dangerous a snare.
Remember the maxim of an ancient sage;
the love of pleasure is a temporary mad-

Another caution, of less consequence in
itself than the preceding, but by no means
unworthy of your attention is, *Beware of
Rigidity*. Generosity is in young persons
natural, and to own the truth, so amiable
a quality, that I would be very careful not
to discourage it. Within the limits of hon-
esty and discretion, let it have free scope;

But the transition from generosity to
parsimony of expense, and from this to
right extravagance, is so easy, esp
with the young that the caution I now
you is by no means unnecessary. Many
young person by indulging this habit
wasted an ample patrimony, and plung
himself into inextricable difficulties;
others, with the same temper, but with
equal resources, have cast the burden
their extravagance upon honest tradesmen
whom they have robbed of their property
in a method somewhat more circuitous,
certainly not less iniquitous, than if
had been guilty of theft or plunder.
cases the most favourable, this disposition
prevents more advantageous application
wealth, and obstructs the useful and
torious exercise of generosity in office
humanity

On the contrary, let me caution you
for in the present times there is some ne
sity for cautioning even the young not
indulge an avaricious temper. Avarice is
deed commonly considered as the pec
vice of old age; and perhaps the love
money, as such, is seldom found to
possession of the heart in early life. But
an age, when riches attract such unwe
attention, when so much value is plac
upon the decorations which they procure
and when they are rendered in such a

of ways subservient to amusement and pleasure; it cannot appear surprising, if young persons are frequently infected with a sordid thirst of gain, and early learn to sacrifice their tender affections, and even their generous virtues on the altar of wealth. It is not then to be thought unnecessary or unreasonable, if I earnestly exhort you my dear children who are as yet unhardened in the ways of the world, to beware lest you be seduced in your simplicity, and robbed of your integrity, by the seducing attractions of wealth. To these cautions it is necessary to add, *beware of indulging a habit of indolence.* Withstanding that natural vigour and activity, which so peculiarly distinguishes the period of youth, that it might almost be thought to supercede the necessity of this caution, it is found in fact, that many young persons, either through some mismanagement in their education, or through a natural sluggishness of disposition, fall into an inveterate habit of indolence. Those who are conscious of any propensities of this kind, cannot be too careful not to indulge them; for when once the tone of the mind is relaxed by sloth, it is scarcely possible to restore it. On the most favorable supposition which can be made, it must be expected that a young man to whom indolence is so far become habitual, that he finds no pleasure in idle taunting, or total inac-

tion, will be indifferent to every laudable pursuit, and incapable of every manly and generous exertion. A mere blank in the creation, he will drag on a tedious existence without benefit to the world, without credit or affection among his acquaintance, and even without personal enjoyment. But it may be much apprehended that the consequence will be still worse. There is in the human mind such a powerful spring of activity, that it cannot long remain wholly unoccupied. If it be not engaged in some useful employments, it will be ready to listen to every solicitation of appetite and fancy.

Be always busy for some purpose either of profit, of usefulness, or at least of innocent amusement. Never think of finding any gratification in doing nothing. The tenure by which we hold our existence, is such that we should be industrious. Labour is the price we must pay for riches, fame, knowledge, virtue and happiness. Think then, for what ends you were created, think what you owe to yourself, to your friends, and to your country. Think that time has golden minutes, if discreetly seized, and let them not be lavished away in unproductive idleness.

The last caution which I shall offer you is, *Avoid bad company*. This caution perhaps of more extensive meaning, and

re consequence, than you may at first apprehend. By *bad company* I understand such persons as would either be likely corrupt your morals, or in any other way injure your reputation, or hinder your provement. *Vicious company* however, that which above all other you should be careful to avoid. Whatever confidence you may be inclined to place in your own good bits and fixed resolutions, be assured, it will scarcely be possible that you should associate with the profligate without being infected by their corrupt principles and licentious manners. You might as soon expect to take fire into your bosom and not be burned, as to become the intimate companion and friend of bad men, and not-partaker of their vices. Assure yourself my dear son, your only safety from such dangerous enemies lies in flight. If you think it of any importance to preserve your innocence, and to secure your peace of mind, your credit and prosperity in the world, and your happiness through every period of your existence, avoid—I do not say, all intercourse with bad men, for this could scarcely be done in the most solitary retirement— but certainly all *intimacy and particular friendship* with them: for, “evil communication,” naturally and almost inevitably, “corrupt good manners.”

To these **COUNSELS OF CAUTION**, respecting things which it will be your wisdom and

duty to avoid. allow me, my dear son, add certain HINTS OF ADVICE, respecting the means by which you may attain intellectual and moral excellence, and secure true and lasting felicity.

And here, my first advice—a due attention to which will prepare the way for every wise purpose, and manly exertion—is, *ambitious of excelling*. There is a natural ardour in young minds, which needs only to be well directed in order to produce the happiest effects. There is, moreover, an excusable vanity, common among young people, which under proper management may be turned to good account. At your entrance on the world, does your bosom glow with the desire and hope of distinction? Cherish the generous flame. Are you unable entirely to rise above the natural infirmity of thinking too well of yourself? Convert it into a motive to vigorous exertion in the pursuit of high attainments in whatever is laudable. Whilst other young persons are conceited of their present talents and acquisitions, be you, my son, emulous of the highest degree of excellence. Let me entreat you, dear son, to keep continually in view the wise design, of making yourself as perfect and happy as possible; the good purpose, of being eminently useful in the world; and the laudable end, of doing credit to your family and connections.

to your country, and to your nature: and let these objects inspire you with even growing ardour in the career of merit.

Attend diligently to the divine precept, "KNOW THYSELF" This precept not only requires a general knowledge of the powers and interests of human nature but a particular acquaintance with your own powers and your own interests. Estimate with as much accuracy as you can the strength of your abilities, in order to know in what undertakings you may engage with a fair probability of success, and what would be unfruitful to your talents or above your capacity. Observe attentively the natural turn of your disposition and temper, that you may discover where it is chiefly necessary to be upon your guard. Remark distinctly the connections in which you are placed, the station you hold in society, and the circumstances, whether favourable or otherwise which attend you; that you may be apprized both of your difficulties and your advantages; and that by providing against the former, and improving the latter, you may make the most of your situation. The better you are acquainted with yourself, the more likely you will be to preserve propriety and consistency of character;—the more effectually you will be guarded against conceit and presumption on the one hand, and against meanness and irresolution on the

other. A modest confidence, becoming a man's station and character, is the natural effect of self-knowledge.

Be it your next care, my son to *learn and exercise self-command*, the difference between one man and another, both with respect to wisdom and happiness, chiefly consists in the different degrees in which reason, or passion, predominates in their characters: Blindly to follow the impulse of appetite and instinct, would be to degenerate into a state perfectly brutal. He who does not learn to govern his passions, will inevitably become their slave. That kind of dominion over yourself which respects the appetites, is absolutely necessary to secure you from hourly disquiet and vexation. But besides these, there is a general habit of self-possession, and self-command, which I earnestly entreat you to cultivate, as an inexhaustible source of tranquility, and an inestimable advantage in the conduct of life. Whilst the man who indulges a restless and impetuous temper, is disturbed and agitated by every trifling occurrence, rushes into action precipitately and without due deliberation, and often exposes himself to hazards which might have been easily avoided, and plunges himself into difficulties from which no after-thought can extricate him: he who habituates himself to restrain and subdue his emotions, and to preserve his mind in a calm

and collected state, will be prepared to seize and improve favourably opportunities, to make use of every possible precaution against impending evils, and to meet with equanimity the unavoidable vicissitudes of life. Add to this, that such a sedate and composed habit of mind will enable you to prosecute whatever you undertake with steady resolution, and will do more to insure your success than eager and rapid impetuosity. Perseverance accomplishes more than precipitation; and there is much good sense in the Persian adage: "The patient mule, which travels slowly night and day, will, in the end, go farther than an Arabian courser."

At the same time that you are diligent to know, and resolute in governing yourself, be careful to *avail yourself of the wisdom and experience of other men*. This may be done, either by asking advice of such friends as you judge capable of giving you good counsel, or by studying such writings as abound with moral wisdom. The latter method will be exceedingly useful, in furnishing you with general principles and particular maxims of conduct, and in preserving you attentive to the important business of moral improvement. But in particular cases, where it is difficult to determine, in what manner it may be expedient to act, no guide can be so useful as a judicious and experienced friend. Guard against that *conceit* which would deprive you of the be-

nefit of wife counfels. It is great prefumption in any one, and especially in a young man, to be fo confident in his own judgment, as to imagine that he can never need advice. "He that hearkens to counfel, is wife."

Thus prepared, enter, my fon, upon the course of life which is before you, with a determined refolution to "let Reason go before every enterprize, and Counfel before every action."

As every man has, or ought to have, fome occupation in life, by which he may benefit himfelf and his immediate connections, and be ufeful to fociety, the choice of an employment, and the manner in which its offices are to be executed, every young man ought to confider as matters of great importance. If, by the united aid of your own self-knowledge, and the judgment and experience of your friends, this important choice has been made in a manner fuitable to your talents and natural difpofitions, you may reasonably expect that your employment will afford you fatisfaction, reputation, and advantage. But that the expectations which you will naturally form at your entrance on your poffeffion may not be frustrated, feveral moral and prudential rules muft be carefully obferved. On this point, let it be your firft care never to engage in any plan of bufinefs, or undertake any concern, however profitable, which your heart

condemns as oppressive, injurious, or in any other respect dishonourable. "Remember, my dear son, the world itself cannot offer you a prize which would not be too dearly purchased at the expence of your honour and integrity. My next advice, with respect to business is. Trust for success more in your skill industry honesty, and punctuality, than in any arts of address or any ingenious management, which may promise to give you an advantage over your rivals. An obliging address and graceful manners, have doubtless a considerable effect in winning the attention and engaging the affections of men, and therefore ought by no means to be neglected, but after all, the world is commonly too wise, at least where interest is concerned, to be imposed upon by mere external show, and nothing will fix and secure their favour, but that solid merit on which they can safely rely. Make yourself thoroughly master of your employments; be diligent and assiduous in business; be faithful and punctual to your engagements; be regular and exact in all your transactions, and it will be scarcely possible you should not succeed. One further caution I shall add on this head; which is, Neither be too much afraid of offending others, nor stoop to flattery and meaness to gain their favour. These are methods of thriving, neither very virtuous, nor very prudent.

“ For they seldom procure lasting esteem, or affection: you will find your advantage in endeavouring to oblige men by easy civilities and real services: but if you gain their favour by flattery you can keep it no longer than you are willing to be their slaves or their tools ”

In your amusements my advice to you is, to be SELECT and TEMPERATE; select, that they may not seduce you into any pursuits unworthy of a well instructed mind; and temperate, that they may not interfere with your more important labours, and your higher duties. Those amusements alone are eligible which by affording an easy and pleasant exertion of the bodily or mental powers, exhilarate the spirits without depraving the taste, or corrupting the heart. And of innocent amusements those are to be preferred which at the same time that they answer the purpose of relaxation from severer pursuits, afford some advantageous exercise of the understanding, the imagination, or the moral feelings

It is an object of great moment, that young persons should early accustom themselves to fill up a considerable portion of their leisure with reading. Cultivate, my son, a taste for reading, and you will find it an inexhaustible fund of elegant amusement, and improving occupation. It will enable you to enjoy many a solitary hour, which

* Lardner's Counsels of Prudence.

might otherwise hang heavy upon your hands: it will furnish you with stores of knowledge, which will qualify you to appear with credit and distinction in the company of persons of sense and education; and it will enlarge your capacity of usefulness in the several connections of society. In order to render your reading productive of these advantages, be careful in your choice of books, that your feelings be not debased, nor your heart corrupted, by a kind of "evil communication," not less dangerous than bad company; and that your time be not wasted upon those insignificant and trifling productions, which convey no information, afford no liberal exercise for the imagination, and excite no manly, generous, and virtuous sentiments. Be guided in this, by the judgment of those who have had further opportunities than yourself of knowing what books are best adapted to afford you elegant amusement and useful instruction.

As a considerable portion of your time will of course be spent in company of various kinds, it may be of great use to you, my dear son, to be furnished with certain leading maxims and rules of prudence on the head of CONVERSATION. In your choice both of companions and associates, next to moral character, which ought unquestionably to be the first object, pay attention to intellectual accomplishments. When you go into company, carry with you, as your

constant attendants, Honesty and Civility. Honesty to preserve you from offering any violence to your own principles and Civility to preserve you from unnecessarily offending others. In all companies, respect yourself so far as to preserve consistency of character; turn your conversation and address to the different circumstances and characters of the person you converse with, but always with the strict adherence to what is fit and becoming in yourself. Regard in the first place, truth and sincerity; in the next propriety and reasonableness: endeavour to keep the due medium between openness and reserve, that you may neither, on the one hand, lay an unpleasant and disgusting restraint upon the freedom of conversation, nor on the other, unnecessarily expose yourself to censure and obloquy. Be ever ready to make candid allowances for the errors or prejudices of others; remembering that you, too have errors and prejudices which will call for candour in return. Beware of despising those who may be inferior to you in some accomplishments; they may perhaps be much your superior in other respects; if not they may have many just claims to esteem, or at least are entitled to the common expressions of civility. Lastly make conversation, as much as possible, a school for improvement. Take pains to gather up and carry away from every company some useful information, or some good sentiment: or if this cannot all

ways be done let every company, however, afford some exercise to your good affections, and furnish you with some manner of useful reflection. "The industrious bee gathers money from every opening flower."

In the advice which I have hitherto given you, I have chiefly considered you, my son, in your individual capacity, and suggested maxims and rules respecting your personal improvement and happiness. It remains that I add a few hints respecting the various important relations in which you stand at present, or may expect hereafter to be placed.

It is an established law of nature, that men should depend upon each other for subsistence and happiness. A human being in a state perfectly solitary and insulated, would be destitute, forlorn, and wretched. Not only will you be necessarily dependant upon others for the accommodations of life, and therefore bound in equity to contribute in your turn to their comfortable existence; but one very essential part of your personal enjoyment must arise from the exercise of the social affections. The heart which has no object on which to exercise its benevolent feelings; no one whom it loves and by whom it is beloved, is destitute of one of the first comforts of life and must have a wretched consciousness of vacancy. From the unbridled thirst of avarice and of interest, learn to look beyond yourself, and to take

an affectionate concern in the welfare of others. Through the wise order of nature this lesson has already been taught you in your domestic relations. Love to your parents, to your brothers and sisters, and to other near kindred, are affections which have already taken deep root in your heart and which have been gathering strength through every advancing year of infancy, childhood, and youth. Still cherish these tender and generous feelings: they will be the source of the purest pleasures in the immediate exercise; and they will become a stock, upon which may be grafted every noble and distinct sentiment of friendship, patriotism, and philanthropy.

The youthful heart is commonly open to the impressions of friendship, and ready to attach itself with ardour to some kindred soul, with which it may participate all the satisfactions of mutual confidence. In forming such attachments, you should, however, be careful, that the person whom you make choice of as your friend, be possessed of that sterling merit which will bear the strictest scrutiny; endued with discretion, to secure you from hazard in the free communication of your thoughts; adorned with good temper, and amiable manners, to render the connection pleasant; and blessed with sensibility and generosity to repay the affection you bestow.

You naturally look forward to the time

when you will form new connections, both in domestic and civil life. It is necessary at present to enter up in the detail of the new series of duties, which will of course arise as your sphere of action shall be enlarged. Only in general, that you may be prepared for the useful offices of active life, let me advise you to cherish, in the mean time, the sentiments of benevolence, and to embrace every opportunity of expressing kind and generous affections. Avoid all such connections and indulgences as would impair the delicacy of your feelings, and indispose you for exercising the "dear charities" of the domestic relations. Habituate yourself to look beyond your own gratification and your own convenience, to those of others. If you wish to be admired as a companion, or loved as a friend; if you would attach those with whom you are connected to your interest; if you are ambitious to be respected in your neighbourhood for civility, generosity, and public spirit; if you aspire after the exalted merit of being a friend to mankind, — early accustom yourself to the divine courses of duty, to bend your own inclinations and humour to those of others; interest yourself in every scene of sorrow, or misfortune, which afflicts to humanity, be attentive to every occurrence in which the public property or the welfare of the nation is concerned. In other words, never forget that you're

born not for yourself alone, but for your family, your neighbourhood, your country, and the world. and on every occasion which calls for the exercise of humane and generous feelings say "I am a man, and nothing interesting to human nature is indifferent to me"

Another article of advice still remains to be added, which, though the last, is by no means the least important. It is this *Raise the edifice of your virtue and happiness upon the sure foundation of religion*—Think it not sufficient that, in consequence of early education and subsequent enquiry, you admit the doctrines of the existence, providence, and moral government of Almighty God as articles of belief; but by frequently recollecting them as truths in which every rational being is deeply interested, deduce from them practical principles, to guide you in the conduct of life. Consider every rule of sobriety and self-government which prudence prescribes, and every act of justice or charity which benevolence dictates, as enjoined by the authority of the great Being, who has established that constitution of nature, in which virtue and happiness are inseparably united, and who has engraved the law of virtue on every human heart.

F I N I S.