# STORIES FROM LIFE

## A BOOK FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

ORISON SWETT MARDEN

THE MIND POWER SERIES VOL. 40

# Stories From Life

## A Book For Young People


## Orison Swett Marden


## Contents

*Stories From Life , O. S. Marden*
*Jazzybee Verlag Jürgen Beck*
*86450 Altenmünster, Loschberg 9*
*Deutschland*

*ISBN: 9783849615178*

*www.jazzybee-verlag.de*
*www.facebook.com/jazzybeeverlag*
*admin@jazzybee-verlag.de*

*Cover Design: © James Steidl - Fotolia.com*

# STORIES FROM LIFE

## PREFACE

To make a life, as well as to make a living, is one of the supreme objects for which we must all struggle. The sooner we realize what this means, the greater and more worthy will be the life which we shall make.

In putting together the brief life stories and incidents from great lives which make up the pages of this little volume, the writer's object has been to show young people that, no matter how humble their birth or circumstances, they may make lives that will be held up as examples to future generations, even as these stories show how boys, handicapped by poverty and the most discouraging surroundings, yet succeeded so that they are held up as models to the boys of to-day.

No boy or girl can learn too early in life the value of time and the opportunities within reach of the humblest children of the twentieth century to enable them to make of themselves noble men and women.

The stories here presented do not claim to be more than mere outlines of the subjects chosen, enough to show what brave souls in the past, souls animated by loyalty to God and to their best selves, were able to accomplish in spite of obstacles of which the more fortunately born youths of to-day can have no conception.

It should never be forgotten, however, in the strivings of ambition, that, while every one should endeavor to raise himself to his highest power and to attain to as exalted and honorable a position as his abilities entitle him to, his first object should be to make a noble life.

The author wishes to acknowledge the assistance of Miss Margaret Connolly in the preparation of this volume.

O.S.M.

## TO-DAY

For the structure that we raise,
    Time is with materials filled;
Our to-days and yesterdays
    Are the blocks with which we build.

Longfellow.

###

To-day! To-day! It is ours, with all its magic possibilities of being and doing. Yesterday, with its mistakes, misdeeds, lost opportunities, and failures, is gone forever. With the morrow we are not immediately concerned. It is but a

promise yet to be fulfilled. Hidden behind the veil of the future, it may dimly beckon us, but it is yet a shadowy, unsubstantial vision, one that we, perhaps, never may realize. But to-day, the Here, the Now, that dawned upon us with the first hour of the morn, is a reality, a precious possession upon the right use of which may depend all our future of happiness and success, or of misery and failure; for

"This day we fashion Destiny, our web of Fate we spin."

Lest he should forget that Time's wings are swift and noiseless, and so rapidly bear our to-days to the Land of Yesterday, John Ruskin, philosopher, philanthropist, and tireless worker though he was, kept constantly before his eyes on his study table a large, handsome block of chalcedony, on which was graven the single word "To-day." Every moment of this noble life was enriched by the right use of each passing moment.

A successful merchant, whose name is well-known throughout our country, very tersely sums up the means by which true success may be attained. "It is just this," he says: "Do your best every day, whatever you have in hand."

This simple rule, if followed in sunshine and in storm, in days of sadness as well as days of gladness, will rear for the builder a Palace Beautiful more precious than pearls of great price, more enduring than time.

## "THE MILL BOY OF THE SLASHES"

A picturesque, as well as pathetic figure, was Henry Clay, the little "Mill Boy of the Slashes," as he rode along on the old family horse to Mrs. Darricott's mill. Blue-eyed, rosy-

cheeked, and bare-footed, clothed in coarse shirt and trousers, and a time-worn straw hat, he sat erect on the bare back of the horse, holding, with firm hand, the rope which did duty as a bridle. In front of him lay the precious sack, containing the grist which was to be ground into meal or flour, to feed the hungry mouths of the seven little boys and girls who, with the widowed mother, made up the Clay family.

It required a good deal of grist to feed so large a family, especially when hoecake was the staple food, and it was because of his frequent trips to the mill, across the swampy region called the "Slashes," that Henry was dubbed by the neighbors "The Mill Boy of the Slashes."

The lad was ambitious, however, and, very early in life, made up his mind that he would win for himself a more imposing title. He never dreamed of winning world-wide renown as an orator, or of exchanging his boyish sobriquet for "The Orator of Ashland." But he who forms high ideals in youth usually far outstrips his first ambition, and Henry had "hitched his wagon to a star."

This awkward country boy, who was so bashful, and so lacking in self-confidence that he hardly dared recite before his class in the log schoolhouse, DETERMINED TO BECOME AN ORATOR.

Henry Clay, the brilliant lawyer and statesman, the American Demosthenes who could sway multitudes by his matchless oratory, once said, "In order to succeed a man must have a purpose fixed, then let his motto be VICTORY OR DEATH." When Henry Clay, the poor country boy, son of an unknown Baptist minister, made up his mind to become an orator, he acted on this principle. No discouragement or obstacle was allowed to swerve him from his purpose.

Since the death of his father, when the boy was but five years old, he had carried grist to the mill, chopped wood, followed the plow barefooted, clerked in a country store,—did everything that a loving son and brother could do to help win a subsistence for the family.

In the midst of poverty, hard work, and the most pitilessly unfavorable conditions, the youth clung to his resolve. He learned what he could at the country schoolhouse, during the time the duties of the farm permitted him to attend school. He committed speeches to memory, and recited them aloud, sometimes in the forest, sometimes while working in the cornfield, and frequently in a barn with a horse and an ox for his audience.

In his fifteenth year he left the grocery store where he had been clerking to take a position in the office of the clerk of the High Court of Chancery. There he became interested in law, and by reading and study began at once to supplement the scanty education of his childhood. To such good purpose did he use his opportunities that in 1797, when only twenty years old, he was licensed by the judges of the court of appeals to practice law.

When he moved from Richmond to Lexington, Kentucky, the same year to begin practice for himself, he had no influential friends, no patrons, and not even the means to pay his board. Referring to this time years afterward, he said, "I remember how comfortable I thought I should be if I could make one hundred pounds Virginia money (less than five hundred dollars) per year; and with what delight I received the first fifteen-shilling fee."

Contrary to his expectations, the young lawyer had "immediately rushed into a lucrative practice." At the age of twenty-seven he was elected to the Kentucky legislature.

Two years later he was sent to the United States Senate to fill out the remainder of the term of a senator who had withdrawn. In 1811 he was elected to Congress, and made Speaker of the national House of Representatives. He was afterward elected to the United States Senate in the regular way.

Both in Congress and in the Senate Clay always worked for what he believed to be the best interests of his country. Ambition, which so often causes men to turn aside from the paths of truth and honor, had no power to tempt him to do wrong. He was ambitious to be president, but would not sacrifice any of his convictions for the sake of being elected. Although he was nominated by his party three times, he never became president. It was when warned by a friend that if he persisted in a certain course of political conduct he would injure his prospects of being elected, that he made his famous statement, "I would rather be right than be president."

Clay has been described by one of his biographers as "a brilliant orator, an honest man, a charming gentleman, an ardent patriot, and a leader whose popularity was equaled only by that of Andrew Jackson."

Although born in a state in which wealth and ancient ancestry were highly rated, he was never ashamed of his birth or poverty. Once when taunted by the aristocratic John Randolph with his lowly origin, he proudly exclaimed, "I was born to no proud paternal estate. I inherited only infancy, ignorance, and indigence."

He was born in Hanover County, Virginia, on April 12, 1777, and died in Washington, June 29, 1852. With only the humble inheritance which he claimed—"infancy, ignorance,

and indigence"—Henry Clay made himself a name that wealth and a long line of ancestry could never bestow.

## THE GREEK SLAVE WHO WON THE OLIVE CROWN

The teeming life of the streets has vanished; the voices of the children have died away into silence; the artisan has dropped his tools, the artist has laid aside his brush, the sculptor his chisel. Night has spread her wings over the scene. The queen city of Greece is wrapped in slumber.

But, in the midst of that hushed life, there is one who sleeps not, a worshiper at the shrine of art, who feels neither fatigue nor hardship, and fears not death itself in the pursuit of his object. With the fire of genius burning in his dark eyes, a youth works with feverish haste on a group of wondrous beauty.

But why is this master artist at work, in secret, in a cellar where the sun never shone, the daylight never entered? I will tell you. Creon, the inspired worker, the son of genius, is a slave, and the penalty of pursuing his art is death.

When the Athenian law debarring all but freemen from the exercise of art was enacted, Creon was at work trying to realize in marble the vision his soul had created. The beautiful group was growing into life under his magic touch when the cruel edict struck the chisel from his fingers.

"O ye gods!" groans the stricken youth, "why have ye deserted me, now, when my task is almost completed? I have thrown my soul, my very life, into this block of marble, and now—"

Cleone, the beautiful dark-haired sister of the sculptor, felt the blow as keenly as her brother, to whom she was utterly devoted. "O immortal Athene! my goddess, my patron, at whose shrine I have daily laid my offerings, be now my friend, the friend of my brother!" she prayed.

Then, with the light of a new-born resolve shining in her eyes, she turned to her brother, saying:—

"The thought of your brain shall live. Let us go to the cellar beneath our house. It is dark, but I will bring you light and food, and no one will discover our secret. You can there continue your work; the gods will be our allies."

It is the golden age of Pericles, the most brilliant epoch of Grecian art and dramatic literature.

The scene is one of the most memorable that has ever been enacted within the proud city of Athens.

In the Agora, the public assembly or market place, are gathered together the wisdom and wit, the genius and beauty, the glory and power, of all Greece.

Enthroned in regal state sits Pericles, president of the assembly, soldier, statesman, orator, ruler, and "sole master of Athens." By his side sits his beautiful partner, the learned and queenly Aspasia. Phidias, one of the greatest sculptors, if not the greatest the world has known, who "formed a new style characterized by sublimity and ideal beauty," is there. Near him is Sophocles, the greatest of the tragic poets. Yonder we catch a glimpse of a face and form that offers the most striking contrast to the manly beauty of the poet, but whose wisdom and virtue have brought Athens to his feet. It is the "father of philosophy," Socrates. With his arm linked in that of the philosopher, we see—but

why prolong the list? All Greece has been bidden to Athens to view the works of art.

The works of the great masters are there. On every side paintings and statues, marvelous in detail, exquisite in finish, challenge the admiration of the crowd and the criticism of the rival artists and connoisseurs who throng the place. But even in the midst of masterpieces, one group of statuary so far surpasses all the others that it rivets the attention of the vast assembly.

"Who is the sculptor of this group?" demands Pericles. Envious artists look from one to the other with questioning eyes, but the question remains unanswered. No triumphant sculptor comes forward to claim the wondrous creation as the work of his brain and hand. Heralds, in thunder tones, repeat, "Who is the sculptor of this group?" No one can tell. It is a mystery. Is it the work of the gods? or—and, with bated breath, the question passes from lip to lip, "Can it have been fashioned by the hand of a slave?"

Suddenly a disturbance arises at the edge of the crowd. Loud voices are heard, and anon the trembling tones of a woman. Pushing their way through the concourse, two officers drag a shrinking girl, with dark, frightened eyes, to the feet of Pericles. "This woman," they cry, "knows the sculptor; we are sure of this; but she will not tell his name."

Neither threats nor pleading can unlock the lips of the brave girl. Not even when informed that the penalty of her conduct was death would she divulge her secret. "The law," says Pericles, "is imperative. Take the maid to the dungeon."

Creon, who, with his sister, had been among the first to find his way to the Agora that morning, rushed forward, and,

flinging himself at the ruler's feet, cried "O Pericles! forgive and save the maid. She is my sister. I am the culprit. The group is the work of my hands, the hands of a slave."

An intense silence fell upon the multitude, and then went up a mighty shout,—"To the dungeon, to the dungeon with the slave."

"As I live, no!" said Pericles, rising. "Not to the dungeon, but to my side bring the youth. The highest purpose of the law should be the development of the beautiful. The gods decide by that group that there is something higher in Greece than an unjust law. To the sculptor who fashioned it give the victor's crown."

And then, amid the applause of all the people, Aspasia placed the crown of olives on the youth's brow, and tenderly kissed the devoted sister who had been the right hand of genius.

## TURNING POINTS IN THE LIFE OF A HERO

## I. THE FIRST TURNING POINT

David Farragut was acting as cabin boy to his father, who was on his way to New Orleans with the infant navy of the United States. The boy thought he had the qualities that make a man. "I could swear like an old salt," he says, "could drink as stiff a glass of grog as if I had doubled Cape Horn, and could smoke like a locomotive. I was great at cards, and was fond of gambling in every shape. At the close of dinner one day," he continues, "my father turned everybody out of the cabin, locked the door, and said to me, 'David, what do you mean to be?'

"'I mean to follow the sea,' I said.

"'Follow the sea!' exclaimed father, 'yes, be a poor, miserable, drunken sailor before the mast, kicked and cuffed about the world, and die in some fever hospital in a foreign clime!'

"'No, father,' I replied, 'I will tread the quarterdeck, and command as you do.'

"'No, David; no boy ever trod the quarterdeck with such principles as you have and such habits as you exhibit. You will have to change your whole course of life if you ever become a man.'

"My father left me and went on deck. I was stunned by the rebuke, and overwhelmed with mortification. 'A poor, miserable, drunken sailor before the mast, kicked and cuffed about the world, and die in some fever hospital!' 'That's my fate, is it? I'll change my life, and *I* WILL CHANGE IT AT ONCE. I will never utter another oath, never drink another drop of intoxicating liquor, never gamble,' and, as God is my witness," said the admiral, solemnly, "I have kept these three vows to this hour."

## II. A BORN LEADER

The event which proved David Glasgow Farragut's qualities as a leader happened before he was thirteen.

He was with his adopted father, Captain Porter, on board the Essex, when war was declared with England in 1812. A number of prizes were captured by the Essex, and David was ordered by Captain Porter to take one of the captured vessels, with her commander as navigator, to Valparaiso.

Although inwardly quailing before the violent-tempered old captain of the prize ship, of whom, as he afterward confessed, he was really "a little afraid," the boy assumed the command with a fearless air.

On giving his first order, that the "main topsail be filled away," the trouble began. The old captain, furious at hearing a command given aboard his vessel by a boy not yet in his teens, replied to the order, with an oath, that he would shoot any one who dared touch a rope without his orders. Having delivered this mandate, he rushed below for his pistols.

The situation was critical. If the young commander hesitated for a moment, or showed the least sign of submitting to be bullied, his authority would instantly have fallen from him. Boy as he was, David realized this, and, calling one of the crew to him, explained what had taken place, and repeated his order. With a hearty "Aye, aye, sir!" the sailor flew to the ropes, while the plucky midshipman called down to the captain that "if he came on deck with his pistols, he would be thrown overboard."

David's victory was complete. During the remainder of the voyage none dared dispute his authority. Indeed his coolness and promptitude had won for him the lasting admiration of the crew.

## III. "FARRAGUT IS THE MAN"

The great turning point which placed Farragut at the head of the American navy was reached in 1861, when Virginia seceded from the Union, and he had to choose between the cause of the North and that of the South. He dearly loved his native South, and said, "God forbid that I should have to

raise my hand against her," but he determined, come what would, to "stick to the flag."

So it came about that when, in order to secure the control of the Mississippi, the national government resolved upon the capture of New Orleans, Farragut was chosen to lead the undertaking. Several officers, noted for their loyalty, good judgment, and daring, were suggested, but the Secretary of the Navy said, "Farragut is the man."

The opportunity for which all his previous noble life and brilliant services had been a preparation came to him when he was sixty-one years old. The command laid upon him was "the certain capture of the city of New Orleans." "The department and the country," so ran his instructions, "require of you success. ... If successful, you open the way to the sea for the great West, never again to be closed. The rebellion will be riven in the center, and the flag, to which you have been so faithful, will recover its supremacy in every state."

On January 9, 1862, Farragut was appointed to the command of the western gulf blockading squadron. "On February 2," says the National Cyclopedia of American Biograph, "he sailed on the steam sloop Hartford from Hampton Roads, arriving at the appointed rendezvous, Ship Island, in sixteen days. His fleet, consisting of six war steamers, sixteen gunboats, twenty-one mortar vessels, under the command of Commodore David D. Porter, and five supply ships, was the largest that had ever sailed under the American flag. Yet the task assigned him, the passing of the forts below New Orleans, the capture of the city, and the opening of the Mississippi River through its entire length was one of difficulty unprecedented in the history of naval warfare."

Danger or death had no terror for the brave sailor. Before setting out on his hazardous enterprise, he said: "If I die in the attempt, it will only be what every officer has to expect. He who dies in doing his duty to his country, and at peace with his God, has played the drama of life to the best advantage."

The hero did not die. He fought and won the great battle, and thus executed the command laid upon him,—"the certain capture of the city of New Orleans." The victory was accomplished with the loss of but one ship, and 184 men killed and wounded,—"a feat in naval warfare," says his son and biographer, "which has no precedent, and which is still without a parallel, except the one furnished by Farragut himself, two years later, at Mobile."

## HE AIMED HIGH AND HIT THE MARK

"Without vision the people perish"

Without a high ideal an individual never climbs. Keep your eyes on the mountain top, and, though you may stumble and fall many times in the ascent, though great bowlders, dense forests, and roaring torrents may often bar the way, look right on, never losing sight of the light which shines away up in the clear atmosphere of the mountain peak, and you will ultimately reach your goal.

When the late Horace Maynard, LL.D., entered Amherst College, he exposed himself to the ridicule and jibing questions of his fellow-students by placing over the door of his room a large square of white cardboard on which was inscribed in bold outlines the single letter "V." Disregarding comment and question, the young man applied himself to his work, ever keeping in mind the height to which he