

***JOHN MATHER
AUSTIN***



***GOLDEN STEPS
TO RESPECTABILITY,
USEFULNESS AND
HAPPINESS***

John Mather Austin

Golden Steps to Respectability, Usefulness and Happiness

**Being a Series of Lectures to Youth of Both Sexes, on
Character, Principles, Associates, Amusements,
Religion, and Marriage**

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he Lectures embraced in this volume, were written for the pulpit, in the usual manner of preparation for such labor, without any expectation of their appearing in print. The author is but too sensible that they are imperfect in many features, both in matter and style. It is only in the hope that they will be of some benefit to the class to whom they are addressed, that he has consented to submit them to public perusal. He has aimed at nothing eccentric, odd, or far-fetched; but has sought to utter plain and obvious truths, in a plain and simple manner. There is no class more interesting, and none which has higher claims on the wisdom, experience, and advice, of mature minds, than the young who are about to enter upon the trying duties and responsibilities of active life. Whatever tends to instruct and enlighten them: to point out the temptations which will beset their pathway, and the dire evils which inevitably flow from a life of immorality; whatever will influence them to honesty, industry, sobriety, and religion, and lead them to the practice of these virtues, as "Golden Steps" by which they may ascend to Respectability, Usefulness, and Happiness, must be of benefit to the world. To aid in such a work, is the design of this volume. If it subserves this end—if it becomes instrumental in inciting the youthful to high and pure principles of action, in hedging up the way of sin, and opening the path of wisdom, to any—if it drops but a single good seed into the heart of each of its readers, and awakens the slightest aspiration to morality, usefulness, and religion—it will not have been prepared in vain. With a prayer to

God that he would protect and bless the youth of our common country, and prepare them to preserve and perpetuate the priceless legacy of Freedom and Religion, which they will inherit from their fathers, this book is given to the world, to fulfil such a mission as Divine Wisdom shall direct.

THE AUTHOR.

AUBURN, June, 1850.

GOLDEN STEPS FOR YOUTH OF BOTH SEXES.

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LECTURE I.

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The Value of a Good Reputation.

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"Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come."—1 Tim. vi. 19.



In this language St. Paul asserts a principle which should commend itself to the mature consideration of every youthful mind. If the young would have their career honorable and prosperous—if they would enjoy the respect and confidence of community; if they would have the evening of their days calm, serene, and peaceful—they must prepare for it early in life. They must lay "a good foundation against the time to come"—a foundation which will be capable of sustaining the edifice they would erect. The building cannot be reared in strength and beauty, without it rests on a secure "corner-stone." The harvest cannot be gathered unless the seed is first cast into the ground. A wise Providence has so ordered it that success, prosperity, and happiness through life, and a respected and "green old age," are to be enjoyed only by careful preparation, prudent forecast, and assiduous culture, in the earlier periods of our existence.

"True wisdom, early sought and gained,
In age will give thee rest;
then improve the morn of life,
To make its evening blest."

The youthful live much in the future. They are fond of gazing into its unknown depths, and of endeavoring to trace the outline, at least, of the fortunes that await them. With ardent hope, with eager expectation, they anticipate the approach of coming years—confident they will bring to them

naught but unalloyed felicity. But they should allow their anticipations of the future to be controlled by a well-balanced judgment, and moderated by the experience of those who have gone before them.

In looking to the future, there is one important inquiry which the young should put to their own hearts:—What do I most desire to become in mature life? What position am I anxious to occupy in society? What is the estimation in which I wish to be held by those within the circle of my acquaintance?

The answer to these inquiries, from the great mass of young people, can well be anticipated. There are none among them who desire to be disrespected and shunned by the wise and good—who are anxious to be covered with disgrace and infamy—who seek to be outcasts and vagabonds in the world. The thought that they were doomed to such a condition, would fill them with alarm. Every discreet youth will exclaim—"Nothing would gratify me more than to be honored and respected, as I advance in years; to move in good society; to have people seek my company, rather than shun it; to be looked up to as an example for others to imitate, and to enjoy the confidence of all around me."

Is not his the desire of the young of this large audience? Surely there can be none here so blind to the future, so lost to their own good, as to prefer a life of infamy and its ever-accompanying wretchedness, to respectability, prosperity, and true enjoyment? But how are these to be obtained? Respectability, prosperity, the good opinion of community, do not come simply at our bidding. We cannot reach forth

our hands and take them, as we pluck the ripe fruit from the bending branch. Neither will wishing or hoping for them shower their blessings upon us. If we would obtain and *enjoy* them, we must *labor* for them—EARN them. They are only secured as the well-merited reward of a pure and useful life!

The first thing to be aimed at by the young, should be the establishment of a GOOD CHARACTER: In all their plans, anticipations, and prospects for future years, this should form the grand starting-point!—the chief corner-stone! It should be the foundation of every hope and thought of prosperity and happiness in days to come. It is the only basis on which such a hope can mature to full fruition. A good character, established in the season of youth, becomes a rich and productive moral soil to its possessor. Planted therein, the "Tree of Life" will spring forth in a vigorous growth. Its roots will strike deep and strong, in such a soil, and draw thence the utmost vigor and fruitfulness. Its trunk will grow up in majestic proportions—its wide-spreading branches will be clothed with a green luxuriant foliage, "goodly to look upon"—the most beautiful of blossoms will in due time, blush on every twig—and at length each limb and bough shall bend beneath the rich, golden fruit, ready to drop into the hand. Beneath its grateful shade you can find rest and repose, when the heat and burden of life come upon you. And of its delicious fruit, you can pluck and eat, and obtain refreshment and strength, when the soul becomes wearied with labor and care, or the weight of years. Would you behold such a tree?

Remember it grows alone on the soil of a good reputation!!
Labor to prepare such a soil.

Believe not, ye youthful, that God has made the path of virtue and religion hard and thorny. Believe not he has overhung it with dark clouds, and made it barren of fruit and beauty. Believe not that rugged rocks, and briers, and brambles, choke the way, and lacerate the limbs of those who would walk therein! No! he has made it a smooth and peaceful path—an easy and pleasant way.—"Wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace."

The young who overlook these considerations—who lay their plans, and cherish their expectations, in reference to their future career, without any regard to the importance of a good character—who, in marking out their course, lose sight of the necessity of laboring to establish a worthy reputation to *commence* with—who, in building their hopes of success and happiness, are not convinced that "a good name" is the only foundation on which such hopes can legitimately rest—have commenced wrong. They have made a radical and lamentable MISTAKE at the outset. A mistake, which, unless speedily corrected, will prove most disastrous in all its influences, and be keenly felt and deplored throughout life.

Those who fall into error on this point, who view a good reputation as a matter of no moment—well enough if you can secure it without much trouble, but not worth laboring for, with zeal and perseverance—have placed themselves in a most critical position. They are like a ship in the midst of the wide wastes of ocean, without chart compass, or rudder, liable to be turned hither and thither by every fickle wind

that blows, and dashed upon dangerous reefs by the heaving billows. Failing to see the importance of establishing a good character, they fall easy victims to sinful temptations, and, ere long, verging farther and farther from the path of rectitude, they at length find every fond hope, every fair prospect, blasted for life.

To a young man, a good character is the best *capital* he can possess, to start with in life. It is much better, and far more to be depended on than gold. Although money may aid in establishing a young man in business, under favorable circumstances, yet without a good character he cannot succeed. His want of reputation will undermine the best advantages, and failure, and ruin, will, sooner or later, overtake him with unerring certainty!!

When it is known that a young man is well-informed, industrious, attentive to business, economical, strictly temperate, and moral, a respecter of the Sabbath, the Bible, and religion, he cannot fail to obtain the good opinion and the confidence of the whole community. He will have friends on every hand, who will take pleasure in encouraging and assisting him. The wise and good will bestow their commendation upon him; and parents will point to him as an example for their children to imitate. Blessed with health, such a youth cannot fail of success and permanent happiness.

But let it be known that a young man is ignorant or indolent, that he is neglectful of business, or dishonest; that he is given to intemperance, or disposed to visit places of dissipation, or to associate with vicious companions—and what are his prospects? With either one or more of these

evil qualifications fixed upon him, he is hedged out of the path of prosperity. To cover up such characteristics for a great length of time, is a moral impossibility. Remember this, I beg you. It is beyond the power of mortals to *conceal* vicious habits and propensities for any long period. And when once *discovered*, who will repose confidence in such a youth? Who will trust him, or encourage him, or countenance him? Who will give him employment? Who will confide anything to his oversight? Who will render him assistance in his business affairs, when he is straitened and in need of the aid of friends? Behold his prospects! How unpromising, how dark!! It is impossible for such a young man to succeed. No earthly power can confer prosperity upon him. He himself undermines his own welfare, blackens his own name, and dashes down the cup of life which a wise and good Providence has kindly placed to his lips, and calls upon him to drink.

If a good character, a spotless reputation, is all-essential to the prosperity of a young man, what must it not be to a young woman? A well-established character for morality and virtue is of great importance to people of every class, and in all circumstances. But to a young lady, a "good name" is a priceless jewel. It is everything—literally, EVERYTHING—to her. It will give her an attraction, a value, an importance, in the estimation of others, which nothing else can impart. In possession of a spotless character, she may reasonably hope for peace and happiness. But without such a character, she is *nothing*! Youth, beauty, dress, accomplishments, all gifts and qualities will be looked upon

as naught, when tainted by a suspicious reputation! Nothing can atone for this, nothing can be allowed to take its place, nothing can give charm and attraction where it exists. When the character of a young woman is gone—all is gone! Thenceforward she can look for naught else but degradation and wretchedness.

The reputation of a young woman is of the most delicate texture. It requires not overt acts of actual wickedness to tarnish its brightness, and cast suspicion on its purity. Indiscreet language, careless deportment, a want of discrimination in regard to associates, even when no evil is done, or intended, will often bring into question her character, greatly to her injury. Many are the instances where a single word, spoken at random, in the giddy thoughtlessness of youthful vivacity, without the slightest thought of wrong, has cast a shadow upon the character of a young woman which it required years to efface. How important that every word uttered, and every deed performed, should be maturely weighed. A discreet lady will not only be careful to avoid evil itself, but will studiously refrain from everything which has even the appearance of evil.

"Whatever dims thy sense of truth,
Or stains thy purity,
Though light as breath of summer air,
Count it as sin to thee."

Young women frequently err in their understanding of what it is that gives them a good name, and imparts their chief attraction. Many seem to imagine that good looks, a

gay attire, in the extreme of fashion, and a few showy attainments, constitute everything essential to make them interesting and attractive, and to establish a high reputation in the estimation of the other sex. Hence they seek for no other attainments. In this, they make a radical mistake. The charms contained in these qualities, are very shallow, very worthless, and very uncertain. There can no dependence be placed upon them.

If there is one point more than another, in this respect, where young ladies err, it is in regard to DRESS. There are not a few who suppose that dress is the most important thing for which they have been created, and that it forms the highest attraction of woman. Under this mistaken notion—this poor infatuation—they plunge into every extravagance in their attire; and, in this manner, squander sums of money, which would be much more profitably expended in storing their minds with useful knowledge, or, in some cases, even in procuring the ordinary comforts of life.

There is a secret on this point I would like to divulge to young women. It is this—That any dress, which from its oddness, or its extreme of fashion and display, is calculated to attract very particular attention, is worn at the expense of the good name of its possessor. It raises them in the estimation of none; but deprives them of the good opinion of all sensible people. It gives occasion for suspicion, not only of their good sense, but of their habits of economy. When a young woman is given to extravagant displays in dress, it is but publishing to the world, her own consciousness of a want of other attractions of a more

substantial nature. It is but virtually saying, "I seek to excite attention by my dress, because I have no other good quality by which I can secure attention."

Could a young woman who passes through the streets decked out extravagantly in all that the milliner and dress-maker can furnish, realize the unfavorable impression she makes upon sensible young men—could she but see the curl of the lip, and hear the contemptuous epithet which her appearance excites, and know how utterly worthless they esteem her—she would hasten to her home, throw off her foolish attire, and weep tears of bitterness at her folly.

Parents are often much to be blamed for this indiscretion in their daughters. They should give them better advice; and instruct them to cultivate other and worthier attractions than the poor gewgaws of DRESS! Do they not know that the worthless and abandoned of the female sex dress the most gaily and fashionably? Should they not urge their daughters to seek for a higher excellency, a more creditable distinction than this?

Here is another secret for young ladies:—All the attraction they can ever possess by means of dress, will be derived from three sources, viz. Plainness, Neatness, and Appropriateness. In whatever they deviate from these cardinal points, they will to the same degree make themselves ridiculous—weaken their influence, and lose the good opinion of those they are the most anxious to win. I beg these truths to be impressed deeply on the mind.

Dress, personal beauty, and showy accomplishments, go but a short way to establish the reputation on which the happiness of woman really depends. Instead of placing