

# Letters from a Self-Made Merchant to His Son

by George Horace Lorimer

**Editor:** Laurel Boruck

## General Information

**Title:** Letters from a Self-Made Merchant to His Son

**Author:** George Horace Lorimer

**BISAC Categories:**

EDU024000 EDUCATION / Reference

HUM010000 HUMOR / Topic/ Business & Professional

HUM011000 HUMOR/ Topic / Marriage & Family

SEL031000 SELF-HELP / Personal Growth / General

**Trim:** 7 x 9 inches

**Format:** Hardcover

**Page Count:** 280 pages

**Number and Type of Illustrations:** Black and white interior drawings

**Retail Price:** \$24.95

## Introduction and Summary

*Letters from a Self-Made Merchant to His Son* is a collection of fictitious letters from “John Graham, Head of the House of Graham & Company, Pork-Packers in Chicago, Familiarly Known...as ‘Old Gorgon Graham,’ to His Son Pierrepont, Facetiously Known to His Intimates as ‘Piggy’” (as the book’s lengthy subtitle so aptly tells us). These letters begin just as Pierrepont is starting his freshman year at Harvard University, and they continue on as Pierrepont finishes his education and starts out on his career. The letters address matters of education, business, personal finances, romance, as well as manners and life as a society man. While they are meant to convey practical advice to readers, what really gives them their character and appeal are Old Gorgon Graham’s aphorisms, which shine from nearly every page (often more than once):

“It isn’t so much knowing a whole lot, as knowing a little and how to use it that counts.”

“The only sure way that a man can get rich quick is to have it given to him or to inherit it.”

“There is plenty of room at the top, but there is no elevator.”

“Of course you are your own boss now and you ought to be able to judge better than anyone else how much time you have to waste, but it seems to me, on general principles, that a young man of twenty-two, who is physically and mentally sound, and who hasn’t got a dollar and has never earned one, can’t be getting on too quick.”

“While a young fellow will consult his father about buying a horse, he’s cocksure of himself when it comes to picking a wife.”

“Marriages may be made in heaven, but most engagements are made in the back parlor with the gas so low that a fellow doesn’t really get a square look at what he’s getting.”

While the book contains only letters from the father’s perspective, the letters offer a glimpse into the life of Pierrepont and have their own story arch if read in chronological order.

## Author Biography

George Horace Lorimer was a minister's son, born in Louisville, Kentucky in 1867. As a young man, he attended Yale University for one year before he was convinced by Philip Armour to come to work for his meatpacking company. Lorimer went on to work at the Chicago meatpacker for several years. During that time, he married and began a family. Lorimer eventually left the meatpacking business and decided to start his own wholesale grocery venture. His company failed within its first year, so he packed up and moved to Boston where he found a job working as a reporter for the *Boston Herald* and *The Saturday Evening Post*.

When *The Post* was purchased by Cyrus Curtis, he promoted Lorimer to literary editor. After a short stint in that role, Lorimer was eventually made editor-in-chief, a position he held from 1899 to 1936. During his tenure, he had a profound impact on the magazine. He grew *The Post* from selling around 2000 copies annually to selling nearly three million copies per year. Lorimer made *The Post* a decidedly American publication: he took firm positions on American business and politics. He also published some of America's most important writers, including F. Scott Fitzgerald, Jack London, and Willa Cather. In 1901 he began anonymously publishing his own fictitious letters in *The Post*, which quickly became popular with readers. In 1916 Lorimer met a young, unknown artist named Norman Rockwell. He began purchasing Rockwell's prints, catapulting the artist to fame and, for the first time, establishing a clear aesthetic for the magazine.

Lorimer retired from *The Post* in 1936, a decision spurred on by his frustration with the state of American politics under FDR's presidency. Shortly thereafter, in the fall of 1937, Lorimer died.

## Publication History

The fictional letters from John Graham to his son were first published anonymously as a serial in *The Saturday Evening Post*, beginning in 1901. In 1902, the letters were collected into a single volume and published by Small, Maynard and Co. under George Horace Lorimer's name. Lorimer later published a follow-up book, *Old Gorgon Graham: More Letters from a Self-Made Man*, but it never achieved the same popularity as the first volume. In 1970, after the book had been out of print for many years, it was republished by Lawrence Grauman Jr. and Robert S. Fogarty. Although the book is now in the public domain, it hasn't been repackaged or republished, making this the ideal time to introduce a new edition.

## History of the Publisher

Small, Maynard and Co. was founded in Boston in 1897. The first work published by the company was a new edition of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, which quickly established the company's success and good reputation. Like most publishing houses, Small, Maynard and Co. transferred ownership a few times. Their good reputation was soon lost, however, when the company filed for bankruptcy in 1927, owing nearly \$1.5 million to creditors. Norman White, president of Small, Maynard and Co. during the financial upheaval, pleaded not guilty to eight indictments in twenty-five counts of larceny. He was later sentenced to 3-5 years in prison for larceny of over \$469,000 from local bank loans.

## Social Culture at the Time of First Publication and Why *Letters from a Self-Made Merchant* Was Popular

The end of the Gilded Age in the United States—from the 1870s to the turn of the century—saw America establishing itself as a major power in industry and agriculture. The American frontier had been conquered, and reconstruction after the Civil War was over. The Transcontinental Railroad had been completed in the late 1860s, an infrastructure which served to connect the entire country, making it possible for goods to be transported over long distances. During the 1870s and 1880s, the US experienced a period of unprecedented economic growth, with an increase in the national GDP, real wages, and an increased demand for labor. By the turn of the century, America's most famous industrialists—or Robber Barons—were at the height of their power.

The turn of the century also saw a new wave of immigration to the United States. This included the tail end of "old immigration" from Ireland, Britain, Germany, and Scandinavia, but it also saw a new wave of immigration including huge

numbers of Italians, Poles, and Jews, as well as many poor, rural people from southern and eastern Europe. When discussing causes of immigration, academics distinguish between push factors (the things that cause people to leave their homeland), and pull factors (the things that attract them to a new place). For immigrants coming to the US in the early 1900s, pull factors included economic opportunity, good farmland, and jobs in mines, factories, and mills.

Needless to say, at the turn of the century Americans—including the scores of new immigrants—were all looking to take advantage of the new economic opportunities. *Letters from a Self-Made Merchant to His Son* was perfectly timed to capitalize on the American national consciousness at the time of publication. In an era of booming industry, immigration, and economic prosperity, everyone in the United States was looking to seize their part of the American Dream. This book offered timely advice from the perspective of a man who had his own rags-to-riches story, and it specifically addressed how his son (or any given reader) might achieve the same kind of success, both in business and in life at home.

The book's epistolary format makes its advice easy to digest, and the fictional story of Old Gorgon Graham makes his success seem attainable. The lively aphorisms lend humor to the advice regarding academic and business affairs, and addressing matters of romance and society life help give a well-rounded image of success. When Old Gorgon Graham's letters were first published as a single volume, they had already been well received as short installments in *The Saturday Evening Post*, making the book an easy sell.

## **What will we need to do to update this title for today's marketplace?**

Although this book's tone and language might make this book seem dated, I think that is precisely what would make it appeal to today's readers. It would be impossible to re-work this book without losing its charm, and for that reason, I suggest very few editorial changes. In addition to the book's charm, many of the themes are just as timely and relevant today as they were a hundred years ago when the book was still new. In his book *The Outrageous Barriers to Democracy in America*, John R. Macarthur quotes Lawrence Grauman Jr. and Robert S. Fogarty (who republished *Letters from a Self-Made Merchant* in 1970) as saying that Lorimer's key to success was "to soothe a public grown weary of radicalism, war, social discord, and weary even of the rhetoric of uplift." Today's public is just as weary, and in our changing economy and our harried world, lots of people—and especially young adults in the same stage of life as Pierrepoint—are looking for ways to make their own success, both financially and in their personal lives. This book balances the charm and humor of a relic from a bygone era with advice that is still relevant today, keeping it from seeming to ephemeral.

There are a few necessary revisions, however. The N-word is used once or twice in passing, which would need to be removed. Additionally, one of the ways this book betrays its age is through its use of benignly sexist language; it doesn't set out to put women down, but it does represent the attitudes and social mores of the time. In some regards, this could give the book a *Mad Men*-like appeal: something that shows how far we've come by contrast (and gives us a laugh in the process). On the other hand, I don't think the type of sexist language seen in this book is a radical departure from what is still seen in books and magazines for men (one need look no farther than *GQ* or *Esquire* or the most recent Tucker Max book to see what I'm talking about). So, while my personal beliefs may want to sway me on this point, I don't think it's necessary to update such instances to gender neutral language. I would suggest slight revisions to the most egregious examples, but all in all, I think it can remain largely as-is.

The key to making this book succeed in today's market will lie largely with its design and production. The original version of *Letters from a Self-Made Merchant* included wonderful black-and-white illustrations throughout, which we should retain. The book will need a complete repackaging and would do well with a modern design with vintage flair. This aesthetic is popular in nearly every channel; it can be seen in the pages of fashion and architecture magazines, on book covers, and in business branding. The cover should rely heavily on typographic elements, and we may consider using one of the vintage illustrations on the cover. Making a sturdy, hardcover edition with a more heavyweight paper would make this an excellent gift or novelty item of display-worthy quality.

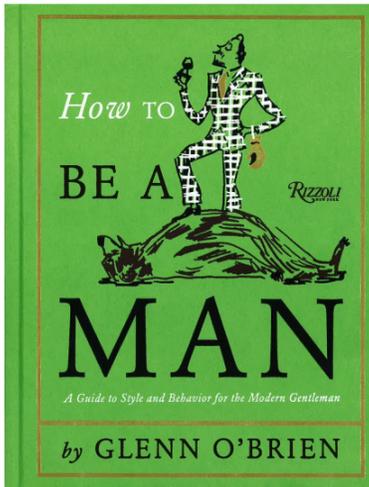
## **Audience**

Men ages 20 and up; urban and suburban men; readers of popular men's publications such as *GQ*, *Esquire*, The Art of Manliness website; entrepreneurs; young men starting their careers; gift givers.

## Comparative Titles

While none of these titles have fictional or epistolary elements in common with *Letters from a Self-Made Merchant*, they each offer advice to men hoping to establish themselves as successful and stylish members of the middle or upper class. Each of these books has done well in the gift or novelty book market, where I would expect our reissue to also succeed. In addition, many of these titles have a vintage-modern design similar to what I would hope to see for a reissue of Lorimer's title. Most of the other titles that fall into the same wheelhouse as these comparative titles have been published within the last five years. This suggests that the market is eager for books like this; alternately, the market doesn't seem to be so flooded that another book on the subject would be superfluous, especially considering the unique nature of Lorimer's book.

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**Title:** How to Be a Man: A Guide to Style and Behavior for the Modern Gentleman

**Author:** Glenn O'Brien

**Format:** Hardcover (2011)

**Page Count:** 304

**Publisher:** Rizzoli

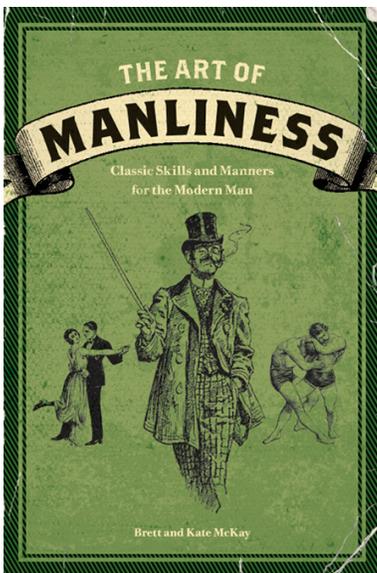
**Retail Price:** \$24.95

**ISBN-13:** 978-0847835478

While this book, described as the “ultimate sartorial and etiquette guide,” doesn't address the same business and educational topics as *Letters from a Self-Made Merchant*, it does address how to successfully present oneself as a successful society man. Lorimer adopts a glib tone throughout his fictional letters, whereas O'Brien's tone tends towards the droll, but readers attracted to a strong, distinct voice should appreciate both books. And, like Lorimer's did, O'Brien's advice often finds itself in the pages of magazines.

This book also serves as a good comparison in both price and design. A cover price of \$24.95 for a reissue of Lorimer's book seems competitive for a well-designed, illustrated, hardcover tome that would find itself at home next to a book like O'Brien's. This also is in line with the aesthetic redesign I propose for *Letters from a Self-Made Merchant*.

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**Title:** The Art of Manliness: Classic Skills and Manners for the Modern Man

**Author:** Brett McKay and Kate McKay

**Format:** Trade paper (2009)

**Page Count:** 288

**Publisher:** HOW

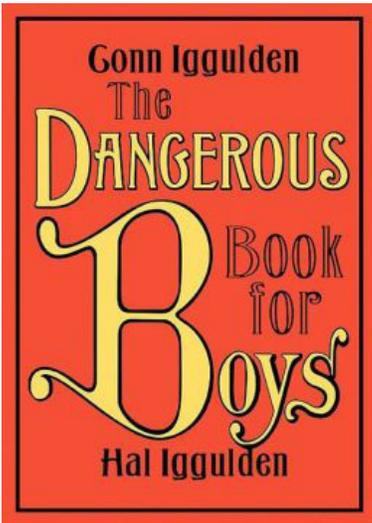
**Retail Price:** \$16.99

**ISBN-13:** 978-1600614620

Again, this is the kind of book that I would expect a reissue of Lorimer's book to be at home next to on a shelf. It offers advice for the modern man with a distinctly nostalgic undertone that harkens back to turn-of-the-century works such as Lorimer's. Our reissue would be priced higher than this book and is different in format, but the audience for each book is identical. This design is modern with a vintage flair, which would suit our reissue, but the vintage elements of this book feel affected; I would recommend a richer, more typographic design for our book.

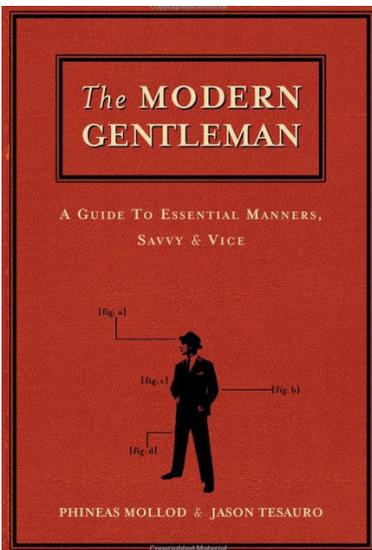
*The Art of Manliness* was written by the founders of a popular website by the same name. Coincidentally, The Art of Manliness posted the first of Old Gorgon Graham's letters on their website as part of their “Manvotional” column. This post generated a number of comments from readers, all saying some variation of “I must read this book!”

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**Title:** The Dangerous Book for Boys  
**Author:** Conn Iggulden and Hal Iggulden  
**Format:** Hardcover (2012)  
**Page Count:** 288  
**Publisher:** William Morrow  
**Retail Price:** \$12.99  
**ISBN-13:** 978-0062208972

*The Dangerous Book for Boys* has been wildly successful since its publication in 2012. This book is priced significantly lower than ours would be and is geared towards children and adults alike, but its nostalgic tone and vintage design are spot-on.



**Title:** The Modern Gentleman, Second Edition: A Guide to Essential Manners, Savvy, and Vice  
**Author:** Phineas Mollod  
**Format:** Trade paper (2011)  
**Page Count:** 336  
**Publisher:** Ten Speed Press  
**Retail Price:** \$15.99  
**ISBN-13:** 78-1607740063

Similar to Glenn O'Brien's *How to Be a Man*, this book offers advice on style and etiquette. Written by two men-about-town, this book also contains humorous advice for the more mischievous men, calling to mind some of Lorimer's more "benignly sexist" (if there is such a thing) comments on women and relationships. The design of this book is, again, spot-on.

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## Conclusion

While republishing *Letters of a Self-Made Merchant to His Son* would require some significant design efforts, it's a relatively low-risk publication. It requires no royalties or advances since it is in the public domain, and no other publishers have a current edition in print. As you can see in the following profit and loss statement, this book is financially viable even with a small print run. The breakeven point requires that we sell just over one thousand copies; anything beyond that is profit. Furthermore, there is room in the market for this book. Current titles suggest strong interest from readers in these types of guide books for men, and Lorimer's book is similar enough to warrant that same interest. On the other hand, Lorimer's book distinguishes itself as the only such guide whose advice is offered through letters and through fiction, and its funny aphorisms lend it a charming quality that will appeal to readers. All in all, this seems like the perfect time to reintroduce Lorimer's work to the world.

## Preliminary Profit and Loss Statement

### Title P&L

*Letters from a Self-Made Merchant to His Son*

George Horace Lorimer

Advance Amount	\$0.00	
Specs		
		Traditional Printing
Units	3000	5000
List Price (ideally: 6.5 x manufacturing cost)	\$24.95	\$24.95
Average Discount	40%	40%
<b>GROSS SALES</b>	<b>\$44,910.00</b>	<b>\$74,850.00</b>
Gross sales	\$44,910.00	\$74,850.00
Returns	10% -\$4,491.00	-\$7,485.00
<b>NET SALES</b>	<b>\$40,419.00</b>	<b>\$67,365.00</b>
Distributor	19% \$7,679.61	\$12,799.35
<b>SALES AFTER DISTRIBUTOR</b>	<b>\$32,739.39</b>	<b>\$54,565.65</b>
Plant, PPB, EDP (actual print bid)	\$11,515.00	\$19,192.00
Royalties (based on list price)	0% \$0.00	\$0.00
<b>TOTAL COST OF GOODS</b>	<b>\$11,515.00</b>	<b>\$19,192.00</b>
GROSS MARGIN	<b>\$21,224.39</b>	<b>\$35,373.65</b>
GROSS MARGIN %	52.51%	52.51%
Operating Expenses (Labor & Storage)	\$2,000.00	\$2,000.00
<b>MARKETING</b>	\$600.00	\$600.00
<b>TOTAL OPERATING EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$2,600.00</b>	<b>\$2,600.00</b>
NET INCOME	\$18,624.39	\$32,773.65
NET INCOME %	46.08%	48.65%
BREAKEVEN POINT - in copies, not \$	<b>1,055</b>	<b>1,759</b>
(Total unit cost x Print run)/Income (per unit) after discount		

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- "The Publishers Weekly, Volume 72, Part 1." Google Books. <http://books.google.com/books?id=WB4DAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA21&dq=Small,+Maynard+%26+Co.&ei=tUO9SN-pEoLmygTv65j3Bw#v=onepage&q=Small%2C%20Maynard%20%26%20Co.&f=false> (accessed December 15, 2013).