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CHILDREN'S BOOKS

THIS is an age insistent upon "*rights*." A *bloc* in Congress has been formed to protect those of the farmer. Numberless unions care for workmen's rights. Women have achieved full political rights, and they have long enjoyed complete control of the home and of the entree to society. The rights of all citizens, to life, liberty and property are secured by most stringent constitutional provisions.

This week and this occasion are dedicated to a consideration of some of the rights of children, a denial of which must tend to render the others I have mentioned practically worthless, from the highest point of view.

Children for their best development require and must have books adapted to their comprehension and so attractive in form and contents as to induce a desire in the children to read them, and to insure pleasure in the reading.

We have reached an era in which children have come into their own—that is, those of them who are fortunate enough to have at their command a reasonable number of the books, delightful and instructive in contents, and exquisite in mechanical form, provided for them by a host of authors and many publishers who have responded splendidly to their needs. It only remains that to their uninstructed minds shall be opened the doors through which they may gain access to the treasury of priceless gems which is theirs.

That children shall be amply provided with proper books is *their right;* it is a manifest *duty* of parents; and it is a blessed *privilege* of those of you who shall go forth to engage in the pursuit of teaching, than which there is none nobler or of more enduring benefit, not only to the taught, but to the nation itself, and to the world at large.

When I speak of books, I mean not mere bound and printed pages. It is of the utmost consequence that the matter read by those who, following us, shall become citizens and rulers of the country, and, in their turn, parents of its future men and women, shall be, in truth and in fact, *literature*. Unfortunately the people at large are not awake to the situation, and many—*most*—of them are content, as with a duty accomplished, if their children acquire some knowledge of such elementary subjects as are taught in the grades, and feel a perfect glow of satisfaction, if, perchance, the youngsters complete a high school course. And even here, it is sadly noticeable that all too frequently the studies pursued are directed to purely utilitarian ends. John Ruskin said: "A nation can not last *as a money-making mob;* it can not, with impunity—it can not, with existence—go on despising lierature, despising science, despising art, despising nature, despising compassion, and concentrating its soul on pence. Of the English he asks—and the question applies at least equally to ourselves,—"What do we, as a nation, care about books? How much do you think we spend altogether on our libraries, public or private, as compared with what we spend on our horses?"—today, he might have substituted automobiles. He goes on: "If a man spend lavishly on his library, you call him mad, a bibliomaniac. But you never call any one a horse," (or automobile)—"maniac, though men ruin themselves every day by their horses, and you do not hear of people ruining themselves by their books. . . What position would the nation's expenditure on literature take as compared with its expenditure on luxurious eating? We talk of food for the mind as of food for the body. Now a good book contains such food inexhaustably; it is a provision for life, and for the best part

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A paper read to students of the State Normal School at Harrisonburg at assembly hour November 14 as a part of the observance of Children's Book Week.

of us. . . . No book is worth anything which is not worth much."

Ruskin, in this excerpt from "Sesame and Lilies,"—with which all of you should be familiar,—is indubitably and eternally right. His remarks are every whit as applicable to our children and their books, as to us who are adult and our books. Even more so! The habit of reading well ingrained in childhood and youth, remains always with us. It is seldom acquired in later life. But further—in childhood and youth, if we read at all, we form the taste for the sort of book we shall, almost inevitably, prefer in manhood and womanhood. Therefore, guard well the door that leads to the child's treasury of books; see that none finds lodgment there which does not in its contents furnish ample reason for its presence. Let the food of the child's mind be such as will mould and nourish a lofty spirit, create a broader and a higher outlook on life, give him vision, and thus make of him the highest type of man and citizen.

Let fairy tales and simple—not silly—verse, in abundant measure, be early read to or by him. It is a rare child whose imagination and love of tales of adventure, will not be stirred and expanded by the first; and almost all quickly respond to the lilt and rhythm of the other. Beautifully bound and illustrated editions of Hans Christian Andersen's, of the Grimms' and of Oscar Wilde's wonderful fairy stories; of fairy and folk tales from Hungary, Turkey, England, France and Italy—in fact, from nearly every country—are readily available. Pinnochio,—a tale of the amazing adventures of a puppet,—"Heidi," and "Moni, the Goat Boy,"—charming child idyls of Switzerland—are excellent. The illustrations in these volumes are the work of real artists, and the child is, by this combination, led at once to an appreciation of beauty in subject, language, and art. Give him, when very young, such delightful little poems as those of Evaleen Stein, the "Rhymes and Jingles" of Mary Mapes Dodge, and Stevenson's "Child's Garden of Verse;" put before him the charming ditties of Eugene Field, which, in one edition, are adorned by pictures in colors by Maxfield Parrish. Let him revel —as he is sure to do—in the quaintness and melody of James Whitcomb Riley; or the graduated anthologies of poetry entitled "The Treasury of Child Verse" and "The Golden Staircase"—marvelous collections, beautifully illustrated. And here let me say, that in all books, for people of all ages, good illustrations are highly desirable, and are indispensable in those for the very young. The child, too, should be early trained to read only books printed in easily readable type, with wide line spacing, because such books, being easily read, more surely prove interesting, and do not injure the eyes.

Let Hawthorne's "Wonder Book" and "Tanglewood Tales," Kingsley's "Greek Heroes," Baldwin's "Story of a Golden Age," and Padraic Colum's "Children's Homer," lead into the wonderful store-house of Greek and Roman mythology and the ever fascinating tales of the siege of Troy; while Sidney Lanier, in his "Boys' King Arthur," and "Knightly Legends of Wales," tells of the legends that cluster around the name of Arthur, teaching the beauty and sublimity of lives devoted to the service of others, and exalting the ideals of truth and honor. Let Henry Gilbert, in his charming style, in "Robin Hood," instil into the youthful mind lessons of generosity and charity, and show that even for outlaws, so long as they yield to such impulses there is opportunity for redemption. Blaikies "Wonder Tales of the Ancient World" sets forth most interestingly a number of the legends of early Egypt, including some which are the bases of narratives embraced in our own Bible.

I strongly urge that too much stress can not be laid upon the early acquisition of a genuine familiarity with at least the simpler myths and legends, particularly the classic ones, which the children should be made to understand are by no means fairy tales, but statements of actual religious beliefs. As the youthful mind becomes more receptive and capable, this instruction should continue and be extended as far as possible. These subjects are admirably treated by Bullfinch in his "Age of Fable," "Age of Chivalry," and "Legends of Charlemagne," Murray's "Manual of Mythology" is an excellent book of reference, though not so attractive in style. "Norse Heroes," by Wilmot-Buxton, beautifully presents the conceptions of our own fore-

fathers of Odin, Thor, and the entire group who, from Asgard, control the actions and fate of mortals, and of the joys of Valhalla.

I attempt no exhaustive list of any of the books dealing with the subjects to which I refer, but merely mention a few of those which I have found, in my own experience, to be of great value.

This knowledge of myth and legend will enable the boy or girl more fully to comprehend and appreciate the real masterpieces of literature when they come to be read, and many of the beauties of these masterpieces will be wholly lost to those who have it not. Tennyson's exquisite "Idylls of the King," "Lady of Shallott," and many of his shorter poems, for instance, presuppose such knowledge. Much of the best work of others of the greatest poets, including Shakespeare, is likewise predicated upon the assumption that the reader knows these things. References, direct and indirect, to them, abound in the higher class of prose. Many of the greatest operas, too, are based upon or actually embody, some of this mythology, and their appeal and intelligibility will be increased by familiarity with these foundations.

The books I have mentioned, and many others in the same fields, as do those I am yet to mention, serve another purpose. From them the child unconsciously imbibes a comprehension and ability to discriminate in the use of words, grammatical forms, and rhetorical style. Forcible and graceful expression, in speech and writing, becomes, as it were, a part of his very being, and these results are far more readily obtained by this natural method than by constant drilling in the dry and uninteresting rules of grammar and rhetoric. With such books as constant companions, too, it seems that it should be nearly impossible that any child would feel either necessity or inclination for resort to the use of the *odious slang* which appears in many of our young people to be rapidly superseding English,—for conversational purposes.

For these reasons, the director of the child's reading should carefully select only such books as, dealing with appropriate subjects, present them in the best literary form.

"Tommy Trot's Visit to Santa Claus," and "A Captured Santa Claus," by Thomas Nelson Page, and a number of stories by Henry van Dyke, for the very young; and for the older children, "Yule Tide in Many Lands;" "Christmas in Legend and Story," a collection of excellent short stories and poems relating to the subject; Dickens' splendid "Christmas Carol," "Holly Tree Inn," and "The Christmas Tree," and Irving's Christmas tales, contain most excellent matter for the joyous season which is the children's very own, while Kate Douglas Wiggin, in the "Romance of a Christmas Card" and in her unexcelled "Birds' Christmas Carol," supplies a most appropriate compound of the pathetic and the delicately humorous.

Amongst the books which are merely beautiful stories of every day life, but nevertheless evoke breathless interest, and help materially to make good reading a habit, I may mention "Donald and Dorothy," by Mary Mapes Dodge, "The Princess and Candyland," "The Princess and the Goblin," by George MacDonald; Alcott's Little Women series; "Sentimental Tommy," and its sequel, "Tommy and Grizel," by James Barrie; "Ramona," by Helen Hunt Jackson; "The Secret Garden," and "The Lost Prince," by Frances Hodgson Burnett, the author, also, of "Little Lord Fauntleroy,"—*supreme in its field*—which it was my privilege, when a mere boy, to read upon its original publication as a magazine serial, the impression then made having remained vividly stamped upon my mind.

All too frequently the attempt to teach history in the school, or to induce its reading at home proves futile, because the child, purely by reason of an unfortunate treatment of the subject in the books presented to him, early acquires, and retains through life, an impression that is a mere jumble of names and dates, and of dull statements of events of long ago, having no relation to the pulsing life of today. How different the result that follows the reading, very early, of such books as Marshall's "Island Story," wherein are recited most simply and attractively, many of the momentous occurrences that have converted England from a mere outlying possession of the Roman Empire, almost despised by it, into one of the mightiest and most cultured of nations. Mary MacGregor, in "The Story of Greece," and

"The Story of Rome," and Marshall, in "Scotland's Story," render the same story relative to the histories of those countries. The series of which "Our Little Spartan Cousin of Long Ago," "Our Little Carthaginian Cousin of Long Ago," and "Our Little Roman Cousin of Long Ago," are representative, is full of appeal to the child of from seven to ten years of age, weaving as they do, about supposititious children of different periods and countries, tales which call up vivid images of the modes and drama of life, as it was lived in the far away ages, and enforcing, without lecture or direct statement, a realization of our human kinship to those who then lived and moved upon the earth, actuated by the same motives and passions, the same desires and ambitions that are the impelling causes of the events narrated in the news of the day. These may be very well succeeded by Eva March Tappan's "In the Days of Alfred the Great," and "In the Days of William the Conqueror." The two last named, and, for somewhat older children, such stories as Marryatt's "Children of the New Forest," Kipling's Puck o' Pook's Hill," and "Rewards and Fairies," Stevenson's "Black Arrow," Kingsley's "Hereward the Wake" and "Westward Ho!" Bulwer's "Harold" and "The Last of the Barons," Arnold's "Phra, the Phoenician," and Doyle's "Micah Clarke," arouse an interest in English history, and cause the child to begin to perceive at work in the events of a nation's life, the inevitable operation of the laws of cause and effect, and how essential it is that they who are to direct the destinies of our own great country, shall be familiar with the course of that operation, in order, on the one hand, to avoid the shoals upon which nations have been wrecked, and, on the other, to pursue the policies which have heretofore insured peace, happiness and prosperity. For the beginner in the history of America, a veritable feast is spread in the collections, in book form, of stories from dear old *St. Nicholas,* now just completing its fiftieth year of beneficent life. Marshall again in "This Country of Ours," and Cooper in the "Leather Stocking Tales," contribute to this feast.

What thrills await the properly prepared youthful reader of Scott's "Talisman," filled with the romance and glamor of the Orient, and the chivalrous devotion, knightly courage, and lofty, though mistaken, purpose of the Crusaders! How he must revel in the delights of "Ivanhoe" and "Kenilworth," of "Quentin Durward" and "Rob Roy," or in Dicken's "Tale of Two Cities" with its graphic pictures of the French Revolution and of the sublime nobility of character of Sidney Carton, voluntarily giving his life, at the guillotine, in the stead of another, with that utterance upon his lips, almost without parallel, in its pathos, in any other work of fiction: "It is a far, far better thing that I do than I have ever done: It is a far, far better rest that I go to, than I have ever known."

How enchanting is the presentation of the conditions of Italian life in the age of Savonarola, and of the man himself, in "Romola," and how the actualities of the middle ages spread, like a panorama, before us, as we follow the father of the great Erasmus, contemporary and antagonist of Luther, in his wanderings as portrayed in Reade's "Cloister and the Hearth."

No one should grow to full manhood or womanhood without some acquaintance, at least, with "Plutarch's Lives," wherein, in parallel biographies of eminent or notorious Greeks and Romans, we find that more than two thousand years ago, human nature was very human, indeed.

How natural the transition from books like these to the more serious, but none the less fascinating, *histories* of the periods and countries of which they treat!

For these older children, poetry is still indispensable. Let them drink in the beauty and sublimity of the wondrous lyrics in Palgrave's "Golden Treasury," and in the Oxford Books of "English and Victorian Verse." Let Burns, Byron, Keats, Shelley, Thomas Moore—too much neglected—and Poe, whose ethereal productions contain the "chrystaline delight" ascribed by him to certain "Bells," work their magic charm. Let Longfellow, with his human kindliness and simplicity of style, teach them those very things. "The Bridge," "The Village Blacksmith," and many more of his poems, are, of course, widely familiar, but I commend to you, and to those of whom you are to be in

charge, his very charming "Tales of a Wayside Inn."

Avoid, as though it were the abomination of death, itself, the work of the so-called "free" poet, who, like Satan, in the ancient story of Job, is now "going to and fro in the earth, and walking up and down in it."

At no stage permit, if it can be prevented, the reading of such books as make up the series of the "Camp Fire Girls," or the so-called "Boy Scouts," "Rover Boys," or "Motor Boy" books, and the other veritable trash which litters, in great profusion, the shelves and tables of the book shops. They are practically all non-literary, in the true sense, are the work of persons unskilled in the simplest rudiments of authorship, violate the fundamentals of rhetoric and grammar, and tend to engender false and even *base* ideals.

As to stories of adventure, besides some of those already mentioned, "The Arabian Nights," "Robinson Crusoe," "Treasure Island," "Kidnapped," "Kaloolah," "Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea," "The Mysterious Island," "The Count of Monte Cristo," "The Three Musketeers," and "The Mutineers," are admirable.

In the matter of "humor"—and an appreciation of real humor ought by all means to be cultivated—the range of choice is somewhat limited. Certainly, that element is wholly lacking in the so-called "funny pages" of the newspapers, and in the "comedy" of the moving pictures. It is likewise not to be found in most of the books *purporting* to be humorous. These are usually merely silly and banal. Dickens, of course, in practically all of his works abounds in it; "Tom Sawyer" and "HuckleberryFinn" are good specimens of an American form, which in my judgment is greatly inferior to the English,—as are the "Hoosier School Boy" and the "Hoosier Schoolmaster." Interwoven with the extremely beautiful story of Joan of Arc, by Mark Twain, are occasional gleams of it, much more subtle, and therefore desirable, than in anything else by the same author. His "Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court" is laughter compelling, and (not necessarily the same), really humorous, but I do not advise it for children, since they are likely to be injured by the caricature it presents of the noble legends of Arthur. "Gulliver's Travels," "Mr. Midshipman Easy," Warner's "Being a Boy" and Aldrich's "Story of a Bad Boy" are all worth while, Gulliver, of course, being excellent; and *"Alice in Wonderand" is superb;* Irving's "Knickerbocker's History of New York is not only a repository of matchless whimsicality, but valuable as introducing an important phase of our country's development. Curtis's "Prue and I" blends most remarkably, genuine humor wth pathos, as do James Lane Allen's "Kentucky Cardinal" and "Aftermath," and Fox's "Little Shepherd of Kingdom Come."

I am informed that "Mother Goose" has been already expounded to you by one far more able than myself. It is for this reason that I have not heretofore mentioned her. Of course, "Mother Goose" and stories like those of "Uncle Remus" are the very beginnings of book culture.

The lack of time forbids my discussing any of the great number of excellent books, dealing in the most attractive manner, with nature in its many forms, and with travel.

In bidding you farewell, let me admonish you that in the selection of books for a child, it is of the utmost importance, that it be kept constantly in mind that the ultimate object of his reading should be to induce in him a constantly increasing determination to acquire more and broader knowledge; that he be stimulated to new thoughtfulness about material things and things immaterial; that he be stirred and uplifted so that he feels within himself a kinship to divinity, and an impulse to rise to greater heights, so that he may come to repeat daily, with genuine fervor:

"Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul,
As the swift seasons roll!
Leave thy low-vaulted past!
Let each new temple, nobler than the last,
Shut thee from heaven with a dome more vast,
Till thou at length art free,
Leaving thine outgrown shell by life's unresting sea!"

D. O. Dechert.