

Good Books and Their Influence on the Minds of Children



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ERNEST LUNDGREN GLADYS DE FRANCO DENITA LINDHAN GEORGE WALKER

By KATE M. SCHWARTZLANDER,

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IT WOULD seem," says a modern writer, "that as the world grows older it takes more and more interest in the things that are young."

"It is certainly true that the warm interest today in child-life is a purely modern development," says Miss Kate Schwartzlander, children's librarian at the Omaha Public Library. "The ancient Greek seldom cared to represent children with chisel, pen or brush. Nor to the Roman was the child anything more than a future citizen. Later among nations semi-barbarous, which were constantly struggling with each other in that desperate contest, ending in the survival of the fittest, the child was still of little account. Now the world has turned to occupy itself with childhood. And among the many signs of deep interest in child-life and all that concerns it one of the most noticeable is the growth of children's literature during the last century."

Some years ago Robert Louis Stevenson wrote a poem which is very short and very true. He said:

The world is so full of a number of things
I am sure we should all be as happy as kings.
And one of the things it is particularly full of nowadays in books; in fact, so enormous has been the flood of books poured forth for the children's benefit that the elders of our own generation watch it with something like dismay instead of happiness.

The father who looks at his children's many dainty volumes, bound, illustrated and decorated with more skill than some of the classics of his own youth, sees most often how lightly these are turned over, glanced at or read once at most and then put aside on the shelves already full. He remembers his own three or four little volumes, and how he loved them, for they were to him book friends, and their influence on his own life was a powerful one. They were read

and read until the ideas they contained were sunk into the very depths of his consciousness and the authors' thoughts and views were his own.

If the child with the larger selection of books does not show such great devotion to one or two, and if his books are not read as often, he has a broader culture and wider range of ideas than the child with three or four volumes.

The concern felt in regard to the great outpour of children's literature, some good and some mediocre, is surely warranted, but still there has never been as conscientious, intelligent and purposeful work done for children as in the last fifteen or twenty years; and if an overwhelming flood of trash has been given us along with the better things, we must accept the inevitable.

From this variety we must choose those that minister most to the children's development into true manhood and womanhood. "Let not memory, imagination or reflection be neglected," says Kate Douglas Wiggin in her book of "Children's Rights." "If children get into the habit of reading silly, cheap or careless literature they gradually lose the power to read what is strong and true and fine, and if they do not get the taste for good literature when they are young they run the risk of never acquiring it."

Style is a matter of importance even at the earliest stages of a child's reading. Mothers sometimes forget that their children cannot read slipshod, awkward, unnatural verse for ten or twelve years and then take kindly to the best things afterward. Long before a child is conscious of such a thing as purity, delicacy, directness or strength of style he has been acted upon unknowingly, so that when the period of conscious choice comes he is either repelled or attracted by what is good, according to his training.

"Mother Goose" is the universal children's classic and there are few children who could not at some time count it among their books. There are many good editions of it and many poor ones. "The Nursery Rhyme Book," edited by Andrew Lang, is an exceptional collection of the ancient rhymes, songs,

charms and lullabies, illustrated with interesting pictures by Leslie Brooke.

The fables and folk stories also belong to the early period of childhood. The reasons why fables should form a child's first reading are obvious—its shortness appeals, as an entire story can be read at one sitting; it is about animals, and animals are a child's natural companions, while the human properties of the animals, and occasionally inanimate objects, appeals. Last, but not least, in the moral lesson to be learned, the child who reads the classic fables has begun his acquaintance with permanent literature. He is applying his powers to that which is worth while. A most attractively illustrated edition of Aesop's fables, with good print, is edited by Joseph Jacobs. He has unearthed for children a perfect treasure-trove of fairy tales and has done for the British Isles a service similar to that of the Brothers Grimm for Germany. There are the "Celtic," "More Celtic," "English," "More English" and "Indian Fairy Tales," all illustrated by J. D. Batten, whose illustrations are nearly as delightful as the stories themselves.

The folk and fairy tales are the legitimate fiction for childhood. In them, as in the works of the great masters of fiction, the cardinal virtues are illuminated and held up for imitation; the worth of ambition, perseverance, generosity, patience and friendship is shown, while their opposites are portrayed in "such frightful men that to be hated they need only to be seen." Grimm shows in many ways how by being dissatisfied with what we have we risk even that. And Andersen's lesson, using his own words, is "Whatever your lot is, make the best of it, and do not pine for that which God has not seen fit to give you."

The North American Indian and negro has furnished us with many charming folk tales. It is needless to mention Longfellow's use of them in "Hiawatha." There is a little book by G. L. Wilson called "Myths of the Red Children," containing traditions of the various tribes gathered from the best sources. Another little book, "Old Indian Legends," by Zitkala-Sa, gives legends of the Old Dakota story-tellers.

The child who is not allowed to read fairy tales is to be pitied. For aside from the unbounded delight children have in them there is an important influence on their mental development. All races have their periods of myth, fairy, fable and folk tales; they are

their beginnings in literature as they are the children's. But as the ages went by there loomed up one great hero around whom was woven many of the traditions and folk tales of the race; he towered above all other heroes; he was the nation's ideal, great in power, pure in heart, gentle in spirit, glorious in form and person and was protected by the gods, but subject to pain and sorrow, and eventually death. Such heroes we find in Siegfried, Ulysses, Roland, King Arthur, Hiawatha and Boewulf. In the stories about these heroes we have an example of the growth of children's literature.

There is no more fascinating chapter of literature for children than that of the old English ballads. Not bound to any author or date, coming from "out of everywhere" and welcomed wherever they chanced to be sung, they were handed down from singer to singer, changing with the fancies of the singers and the passing generations. The ballads picture a simple people, loving the primitive virtues of endurance in the woman and valor in the man; of faithfulness in the servant and generosity in the lord. The people who dwell in ballad land have a hearty relish for humor and a healthy love for the out-of-doors; they have a robust sense of justice, though somewhat crude, for they see no fault in Robin Hood taking from the rich to give to the poor. Eva March Tappan, whose work for children is extremely good, has a delightful book entitled "Old Ballads in Prose," as well as a "Robin Hood."

Those who write humorous stories for a child must take the child's point of view and enter thoroughly into the child's world. Lewis Carroll was able to do this so admirably in "Alice in Wonderland" and "Through the Looking Glass" that they are more popular today than forty-five years ago, when first published.

Every child should have an opportunity to know the world's great stories, such as "Robinson Crusoe," "Swiss Family Robinson," "Gulliver's Travels" and "Pilgrim's Progress," being sure in each case he has

the proper text; that is, if the full version is not used it must be selected parts, but never a writing down of a great book under the supposition that the child cannot understand the original. If he is not ready for the original, give him something else good, not imitations; the written-down versions, instead of attracting and preparing the way for the great originals, take the spirit out of the great stories, lower the literary standard you are endeavoring to set up and injure the taste for better things.

Till their ninth or tenth year we find boys and girls reading the same class of books, the fairy tales and hero stories. After this age there is a more pronounced change in their reading—the boy demands the war and Indian stories and stories of adventure, while the home and school story appeals to the girl. It is not as great a problem to keep the boy supplied with good books as the girl, for the books of adventure, war and animal life are many and good. This is fortunate, because if it were not so we could not induce a boy to read a good "girl's book," while many girls enjoy the stories of adventure and history.

None of the great novels have been mentioned which should form a part of every young person's literature, for if they are not read in youth often there will be no time and desire for reading them later. One who has had years of experience teaching and working with young people says, "Youth is the time to read Scott." Ivanhoe was the only one he had access to in youth, and since he has tried to read others by that author, but without much enthusiasm.

M. V. O'Shea paid a splendid tribute to good books when he said: "I have come to believe that all sorts of spiritual ills can be cured and errors avoided only by the right sort of occupation, and so I think it of the greatest importance that every individual from 7 or 8 onward should have at hand for his leisure moments some book suited to his capacity and interests, and that has lived because it has encouraged and inspired and ennobled people."

The Meeting Place of Old Days

WE USED to go to meeting there. We did not call it attending church or divine service then. We had not got cultivated out of calling things by their right names, says a writer in the Philadelphia Inquirer.

The meeting house stood on a windy hill, with the graveyard behind it and back of that a grove of pine trees where the older folks went to eat their lunch in the morning and the younger folks went to do a little sly flirting and exchange the harmless gossip of the times.

The meeting-house was a square structure, entirely guileless of any eccentric curves and gables and angles and it was painted white and it had four immense windows on each side and there were forty-eight panes of glass in each window, for we always used to amuse ourselves by counting them when ever the sermon dragged out unwontedly long and we got out of patience waiting for the welcome—"And finally, my brethren."

The glass was plain, honest glass and through it we could see the sunlight playing over the grain fields and the cows asleep in the adjacent pasture and the tall dark tops of the spruces out clear against the sky as they lifted up their heads on the distant mountain peak, it seemed to us among the clouds themselves.

The minister believed what he preached and his hearers felt it. His sermons were oftentimes two hours long and everybody nearly collapsed under the affliction, but they would have died rather than said so.

And the solemn-faced deacons who sat in the puffed space just in front of the pulpit and listened

with closed eyes would have been scandalized to death if anybody had hinted that they were sound asleep from the time the text of six verses was given out until the time the benediction, fifteen or twenty sentences long, was pronounced.

There was a long gallery back of the pulpit where the singers sat—and there was more than a score of them—and there was a big man in spectacles who played the bass viol and a short little man with puffy cheeks and a swallow-tailed, brass-buttoned coat, who played the clarinet and there was a tall lank bodied chorister, who stood in front and beat time and shook all over with the music till even his boot heels clicked responsively to every note; and the old meeting-house fairly rung with Coronation and Balaerna and New Jerusalem; and the spiders' nests in the gallery waved in the breeze made by the singing, and all the singers fanned themselves with turkey-tail fans when they sat down, and whispered together as if congratulating themselves on having got safely through and nobody killed or wounded.

And when the afternoon meeting was out, and the wagons were brought to the door, what friendly greetings were exchanged! What cordial invitations to "Come over and spend the day were given! Feather rheumatism, and Mary Jane's croup, and the "raising" at Deacon Permenter's, and Mrs. Jones' quilting were all talked over; and then the minister came out and shook hands all round, and everybody invited him to come over to "our school-house and hold a meeting," and then the people went home and talked the sermon over and by the time they had got it thoroughly digested, Sunday had come again, and the doors of the old meeting-house were open once more.

Two Russian Captains of Industry

TWO notable figures in the great business world of Russia have just died, Nicholas Boukhroff, the "grain king," who died at Nijni-Novgorod, and Alexander Mantashoff who made his fortune in naphtha and died in St. Petersburg. He left an estate of more than \$40,000,000 rubles, according to a dispatch to the New York Sun.

Mantashoff's personality is connected in a curious way with a recent phase of the internal history of Russia. In 1905 he paid a large sum to be escorted by Russian cavalry, re-enforced by Maxim guns, from Tiflis to the Austrian frontier on his way to Paris, where he lived until two years ago. His reason for leaving Russia was that during the revolution in the Caucasus he was too good a prize to be let alone.

Terrorists and brigands offered him their protection at a price conveyed in blackmailing letters. For a month or two he paid; but within ten days he found that he had handed out \$0,000 rubles to nearly a score of organizations he decided that he could live cheaper and calmer abroad, provided he could get there.

He owed the making of his fortune to luck and daring. His father was an Armenian storekeeper at Baku. Young Alexander bought an unpromising naphtha claim and by pluck and persistence turned it into a profitable producer. Then he grew rich not in days, but in hours, as they say. Until his death he was on the council of the most prosperous of the Russian commercial and industrial banks, the Azoff-Don bank.

He was very generous to Armenian institutions. Over fifty bursaries or scholarships were founded by him to enable young Armenians to go through the university course. When in Paris he furnished the

money for building the beautiful Armenian church there, and the chief Armenian theater in Russia, at Tiflis, is a present from him. He was a keen amateur of the drama, and until his final illness used to see all the new plays in St. Petersburg.

Of entirely different stamp was the other man of millions, Nicholas Boukhroff. In his externals he was a mujik merchant. He wore the top boots, the trader's kaftan—coat and overcoat in one, sitting close up to the neck and reaching to the knees—and the embroidered cotton shirt without starched collar which are the historic garb of the Volga traders, men who carry as much as \$0,000 rubles in notes stuck in the leg of a boot and who distrust the documentary machinery of credit. Boukhroff's great fortune compelled him to handle investments and bank paper, but he was in sympathy with the old simple ways. He was in fact an Old Believer and a devout churchgoer who lived his religion.

In his housekeeping he lived on much the same scale as an ordinary hand worker in comfortable employment. He gave away millions of rubles in charity, but was close fisted in personal outlays. The porters at Nijni-Novgorod and elsewhere avoided him as they saw him step from a train. He would never pay them more than 10 cents for carrying his baggage. When he met great personages he "thowed" them, as he did everybody else, keeping to the Old Believer, Quaker-like form of address. His integrity in business was of the highest.

He would lecture men in his employment if they spent five kopecks needlessly. His patriarchal ways had sometimes a welcome side. He exacted unquestioning obedience to his instructions; but every now and then a man who had served him well for some years would receive a draft for \$5,000 or \$0,000 rubles with no further remark than: