

Children's Books

By Mrs. Sophie Bryant D. Sc.

From *The Parents' Review*

The influence of a child's reading upon the child's development of intellect and character is so great, that few topics of educational discussion can interest parents more than the composition of a child's library. Parents and teachers can help one another much by interchange of ideas on this subject. I trust that the few suggestions which I am about to make, may be taken as merely the introduction to a discussion of the subject by parents in the pages of this magazine.

In the first place let us note and emphasise the familiar fact that children, although they have free access to it, so frequently omit to read the good literature which a former generation of children did read. The common neglect of the Waverly novels is the most familiar instance. The reason for this neglect is obvious; valuable literature, which makes some demand on attention, reflection and imagination, is in these days brought into competition with a vast supply of over-easy or over-stimulating, but perfectly valueless, books to which the indolence of average human nature gives the preference.

Hence we may lay down as the first condition of the children's library that *there should be no book in it that has not a good reason for being there*. A valueless book, though innocent of evil, may still be a cause of evil by the negative results which it produces. Children should be protected from the training of such books *until their taste is formed*. I would, therefore, put no book in the child's way unless I was satisfied that the book was one in the reading of which there was a distinct gain.

Let so much suffice for our negative principle. The positive question has greater interest. I will briefly state my idea of the answer to it under four heads.

1. There is already in the world a great deal of valuable literature which everyone should read some time or other, and much of which can be read with the greatest pleasure and the best chance of permanent impression in childhood. Fairy tales not read in childhood are missed of their full effect

for life, and a similar remark in lesser degree applies to all story that has had its birth in the childhood of the world. To be ignorant of such literature is to be excluded from an important part of that education in the humanities which we rightly estimate so highly. All cannot be classical scholars, but all can have been steeped during childhood in the culture of European folk lore, and, following it, in the culture of the ancient heroic romance. We cannot all taste the full flavor of the great literary masterpieces as clothed in the language of the original writers, but we can all, by means of good translation, or even adaptation well done, get behind the literary masterpiece to the heroic tale which inspired it, and which may inspire us.

Here, then, is the idea of the two first and most important shelves in the children's library. The first contains all the good folk lore-folk lore of all nations-and all the classic fairy tales. On this sort of literature, ages ago, our fathers were nursed; our knowledge of it brings us closer to them, and our extension of this knowledge to all nations broadens our sympathies to the world's span. Like them, when immersed in the nature myth, we lie close to nature and partake in the primitive culture of imagination and feeling which is so apt to be lost in the mere rationalism of the nineteenth century.

As for the second shelf, it also is devoted to literature. Fill it with all the tales of ancient heroic romance of which well-told versions in the mother tongue can be obtained. This is the most educative shelf in the whole library. I believe that for moral education its value is immense. Both the German philosopher Herbert, and the American teacher, Dr. Felix Adler, have pointed out that the heroic tale is a mean between the life of the man and the life of the boy, and thus peculiarly suitable to lift the boy to manly levels. The hero is a man, but his life is free from those complications of modern life through which the boy's mind cannot, with ease, follow the windings of the moral thread. The main virtues-which are the primitive virtues-of courage, courtesy, self-denial, and the like, can hardly be taught better to him than by the heroic stories of Greek and Roman, Teuton and Celt.

It would be well if the writers of children's stories would turn their attention to the great and perennial fund of literacy delight existing in masses of ancient heroic and mythologic literature which still require to be translated, and even re-told, to render them suitable for the modern English child. Homer we have, however, in good translations of him which are best of all for English readers. His stories, moreover, are

well-told in briefer form by Church, whose *Stories from the Greek Tragedians* seems to me to be even more valuable than the stories from Homer. But there is still work for the teller of stories, even in the well-trodden field of classic literature. Turning to other regions, the conception of Norse heroism ought to be familiar to every child, and the sagas in excellent translations are at hand. They are, however, too long and cumbrous for most readers, and much remains to be done to bring down their extreme epic character to the more lyric-delighting levels of youth. The Celtic stories on the Irish side are still largely buried in the original Gaelic, but the Irish literary genius is close at work upon them, and several delightful books are now readily available. For the other branch of Celtic story there is the *Mabinogion*, and the Arthurian romance, as told in our own day by Tennyson, ought to be read by all as soon as possible.

As an addendum to this literary shelf, marking the transition to adult thought, we should have Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare*, Shakespeare himself, and the other great masters of literature as the child's mind can rise to them. Good selections of poetry also form part of this shelf.

I would like to see, moreover, in this place an edition of the Bible really adapted for the children's use. I do not mean stories from the Bible, but selections from the Bible itself, with no gem of the literary setting lost, but abundantly illustrated to assist the intelligence by the side-lights of pictorial imagination.

And this remark on pictures leads me to add that pictures are required always when the meaning is somewhat in advance of the child's development. Little children require them in all books; big children require them in the books that are difficult.

2. The idea of the next shelf may be stated briefly. The children can learn, through his reading of fiction, a great deal about the physical character of the world, and can combine this with a training in the spirit of enterprise. We want, therefore, for our third shelf all the good stories of travel and adventure. Captain Mayne Reid and Ballantyne were the favourites in my day, and I believe they are not superseded now, though others can be added. Stevenson's *Treasure Island* is no doubt one of the best books of the kind.

Add to this shelf books of real travel, for the reading of which the story of adventure is a training. The story of the Arctic Expeditions may perhaps specially here be mentioned as of value. Ballantyne's *Ungava* is a good introduction to it.

3. Historical romance next claims our attention. To a healthy young mind this is more attractive than the ordinary novel, and its wide interests make it much more wholesome for the immature mind. A good list of historical novels, not too long, would be most useful, and the members of the Parents' Union might undertake to make one. Into this category comes the great Scottish novelist with almost all his works, including the poems. Stevenson's *Kidnapped* and *Catriona* are recent additions. Henty's books the children know. Besant's *For Faith and Freedom* and *Dorothy Foster* are excellent. It is to be desired that their author should give us more of this kind.
4. Our last shelf may be filled with stories of everyday life. There are good books to be placed in it, and multitudes of books that ought to be excluded. Our negative principle here should be rigidly applied. Tom Brown is a classic and claims a place by prescriptive right. Mrs. Molesworth's *Carrots*, Mrs. Ewing's *Story of a Short Life*, Miss Alcott's *Little Women*, and Mrs. Burnett's *Little Lord Fauntleroy* I do not regard with any doubt. But my knowledge of this branch of my subject is not very great, so I leave further suggestions only too gladly to my readers. Every book, however, should be read through by some competent judge before it is allowed a place upon this shelf.

My last word should be a protest against any division of the library into separate parts for boys and girls. The boys may more often choose one book, the girls another, but let both have the same range of choice. Thus a closer community of feeling and interest is cultivated, the gain of which is reaped in the sympathetic relations of after-life.

I add a list of such books as I know and can recommend.

A few Suggestions towards the Children's Library of Fiction*

I. Fairy Tales, Folk Lore, Etc.

The Red Fairy Book by Andrew Lang

The Blue Fairy Book by Andrew Lang

The Green Fairy Book by Andrew Lang

Anderson's Fairy Tales (Hans Christian Andersen)

Grimm's Fairy Tales

English Fairy Tales by J. Jacob

Celtic Fairy Tales by J. Jacob

Indian Fairy Tales by J. Jacob

Irish Fairy Tales by W. B. Yeats-Children's Library

Aesop's Fables

Arabian Nights

II. Heroic Romance, Etc.

Finn and His Friends by Standish O'Grady-Children's Library

Celtic Romances by Joyce

The Boy's Mabinogion

Grettir the Outlaw by Baring Gould

Norse Tales by Dasent

The Iliad and The Odyssey (Pope's translation has much to be said for it)

The Aeneid

Stories from Homer by Church (Alfred)
Stories from the Greek Tragedians by Church
Tanglewood Tales by Hawthorne
Heroes by Kingsley
Hiawatha by Longfellow
The Golden Legend by Longfellow
Idylls of the King by Tennyson
Lays of Ancient Rome by Macaulay
Children's Bible with selections with illustrations

III. **Adventure and Travel#**

Robinson Crusoe by Defoe
Ungava by Ballantyne
The Coral Island by Ballantyne
The Bush Boys by Mayne Reid
The Young Jagers by Mayne Reid
The Rifle Rangers by Mayne Reid
The Plant Hunters by Mayne Reid
The Boy Hunters by Mayne Reid
The Forest Exiles by Mayne Reid
The War Trail by Mayne Reid
The Last of the Mohicans by Fenimore Cooper
Treasure Island by Stevenson

The Desert Island by Kingston
On the Banks of the Amazon by Kingston
Cook's Voyages
Dunollan's Voyages
Life in South Africa by Hunter

Historical Novels, Etc.

The Talisman by Scott
Ivanhoe by Scott
The Abbot by Scott
The Monastery by Scott
The Pirate by Scott
Quentin Durward by Scott
Anne of Geierstein by Scott
Woodstock by Scott
Kenilworth by Scott
Scott's Poems
Kidnapped by Stevenson
Catriona by Stevenson
The Merry Men by Stevenson
The Black Arrow by Stevenson
For Faith and Freedom by Besant
Dorothy Foster by Besant

To these I would add collections of historical ballads, Scotch ballads, Border ballads, Ballads of Robin Hood, and the like.

Children's Everyday Life and Miscellaneous

Christmas Carol by Dickens

Tom Brown's School Days

Little Lord Fauntleroy by Mrs. Burnett

Story of a Short Life by Mrs. Ewing

Carrots by Mrs. Molesworth

Little Women by Miss Alcott

Add a complete edition of Dickens, to be read in due course as the taste for more adult ideas shows itself.

*Every book recommended is known to me personally. I have many valuable suggestions from others not incorporated in the above, as I have not yet had time to read the books.

#The following have been recommended to me on good authority.

%These of Scott's novels I notice specially, but the Library should contain a complete edition of Scott.

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