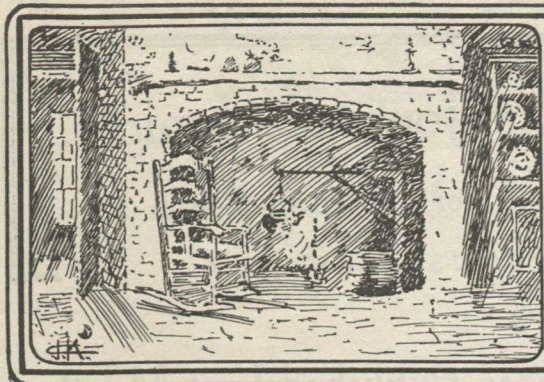




AROUND THE HEARTH

Written for the Canadian Home Journal

By JENNIE ALLEN MOORE

"ALL work and no play would make us dull,
So at the common school,
To study, and to play a while,
Has always been the rule,
And all our fun is jolly-oh,
At the pleasant common school."

WORKING AND PLAYING

MOTHER, here are some of your sentiments," my boy said, handing me a newspaper, and pointing to a paragraph which read: "If the public school children of Ontario are looking for a hero, here is what Dr. Geo. Locke, chief librarian of Toronto, says: 'Home work is the most arid, most inhuman, and most futile educational method ever perpetrated on the human race. It should be abolished for ever.'"

"Yes, 'them's my sentiments' all right, and have been since I was a public school scholar, and perforce carried an armful of books home every night, placed them in a drawer, where they rested peacefully until next morning, and were carried back again without opening a page. Not so with my sister, who pored for hours over her home work at night, and resumed it in the morning if she had any spare minutes, and came home complaining, 'I don't understand how my lessons are so imperfect. I am sure I study hard enough all evening, and at school. There is Jennie now, she romps and plays all evening, and only has the half hour study period in school to get up her lessons, and she never seems to have a mistake.' In these days I give all the credit for this to a wonderful memory, but, looking backwards, I question whether it was not the invigorating exercise in the fresh air, and consequent sound sleep that followed, that fitted my brain for the mental feats of memorizing whole pages of history and literature without any apparent effort.

I never did home work myself, never inflicted it on my pupils during eight years in the teaching profession, and never questioned my children regarding it. That they were given lessons to prepare at home goes without saying; whether they did the work or not, was a matter of indifference to me. If a game of ball held greater attractions outside, they were left free to enjoy it; and if the unprepared task confronted them next day, and punishment was meted out, they "took their medicine," and received neither rebuke nor sympathy from mother. My policy was not to openly oppose a teacher's authority, but simply let it rest with themselves. Not once in all their school life were my children called from healthful outdoor exercise and admonished to sit down at home work.

I remember a little girl, the eldest of a family of four, whose heartaches were many over the home work question. She would no sooner appear in the door than her mother would say, "I was just waiting for you, Ella, to go to the store," and forthwith give her the commission. When she returned it was, "Take baby out in his carriage while I get tea." "But mamma, my home work." "Never mind it now; hurry and take baby." Then after supper was over, and the dishes washed she would pick up her books with the same little worry frown she had worn on her face ever since four o'clock. In a few minutes she would receive the command to take her little brothers upstairs to bed, a usual occurrence if company came in, or her mother was busy.

Then another effort to resume the study, in the midst of which she would be reminded her bed-time hour had arrived, and she must close her books and retire. Not to sleep though, for the unfinished task troubled her, and she would fret and toss, and her dreams were haunted by it until the child became a shadow of herself, and was ordered by the family physician to be taken out of school. Her case is just a sample of the injury done, where a nervous, sensitive child, anxious and willing to assist mother, is overburdened with a constant shadow of lessons. I cannot better explain my position as regards this subject than by quoting from my own article published four years ago in the CANADIAN HOME JOURNAL. As my opinions have not altered, perhaps I may be excused for repeating it *ad verbatim*.

IN an address given before a class in household economics at the Technical School, Toronto, by Dr. Charles Sheard, Medical Health Officer, he struck at the root of a national evil when he scored the school system which permits children to have home studies. While all will not agree with his idea of shorter school hours, and more lengthy vacations, the thinking mind of this great Dominion should give the gravest consideration to this key-note of an injurious custom, and abolish from the Public Schools the practice of home study for its pupils. All honor to the brave man who did not hesitate to express his convictions with no uncertain sound.

Who is responsible for this state of affairs, parents or teachers? Both are equally so, but primarily the parents in permitting after-school work to be performed. It is to be deplored that so many parents are under the impression that unless the young heads are deluged with heavy tasks the teacher is neglecting his duty.

If they should unitedly rebel against it there would not be much protest from the teachers, as with very few exceptions, they would be willing to forego the additional work and trouble of giving and examining home work. There is always the over-zealous teacher, of course, to reckon with, those of the old regime, who cling to long-fostered habits, but they are in the minority, and would soon fall into line with up-to-date methods, or be asked to retire from active service.

Surely, with the advance of the age in which we live, when educational advantages are such that a child's school-life extends from the age of seven to fourteen years, we can afford to let the six hours a day be sufficient when health authorities inform us that one hour of mental labor is equivalent to three of physical! With the excellent method of pre-arranged study, and systematic teaching, steady progress is assured, so why should we adhere to the primitive days when boys and girls were only given so many months' schooling yearly, and perforce had to work hard at the three R's all evening? That was not really any self-denial on their part, for other books and papers were scarce, probably one weekly being the limit, while our homes, full of good books, papers and magazines, all educators, must be ignored, while our children sit pouring and worrying over home lessons.

Some teachers, when remonstrated with, will say, "I do not give them much to do, just a little work." Here is a point to note. *It is not the amount of work given to do that harasses the youthful mind and forms a barrier between the child and any enjoyment it might otherwise have, but it is the ever-abiding, omnipresent conviction "I have my home work to do."* The thought is depressing, the only relief is to sacrifice the bright sunshiny hours immediately after school—the very time they should be enjoying recreation in the open air—and dispense with that duty, then the burden being lifted, there is a sense of freedom. We older people understand this experience, and can sympathise, for neglected or postponed duties are anxiety tormentors. Thus, our children are under a continual mental strain, which in a nervous nature works havoc, noticeable in irritability if required to assist in domestic employment, or running of errands, which should be a pleasure, the inevitable answer freeing them from such a necessary part of their training.

Home conditions, too, are often unfavorable for home study. The lights are poor, or insufficient, perhaps. Is it not a great evil that students must spend the precious hours, often far into the night that should be given refreshing sleep, thereby restoring their wasted energies, to ruining their health and preparing them for physical wrecks when their education is completed? Is it fair, parent, teacher, to bind down both body and mind until there is apparently no liberty left? Grant them the privilege after school of a splendid, unrestrained romp in the air and sunshine, healthful exercise, and a free mind. Let their evenings be open for family and home life, for music and reading, in short to follow their own individual tastes. All too soon the strenuous life we lead will overtake them. Then release them from this childhood's drudgery, bondage, slavery, what you will, and your wisdom will be reflected in the happier faces, stronger intellects, and perfected characters of the students around you. What city will set the example by prohibiting home study for public school pupils, and furnish for other schools to follow, a wise humane precedent?"

OUR system of education in Canada is something we, as Canadians, are proud of, but we do think that the course, as pursued by the boys and girls of our High Schools, especially, is injurious, and inconsistent with good health. Many scholars of both sexes are nervous wrecks, when the laurels for which they have sacrificed health, pleasure, and home life are won. We read in the pale faces and hollow eyes in the lack of vitality and strength which has been sapped by over-study; the brain's development has caused the loss of a vigor and buoyancy of body and spirit, which is hard to regain. William George Jordan, a famous American journalist says:—"The educational system of to-day is a monumental institution dedicated to Hurry. The children are forced to go through a series of studies that sweep the circle of all human wisdom. They are given everything that the ambitious ignorance of the age can force into their minds. They are taught everything but the essentials—how to use their senses and how to think. Their minds become congested by a great mass of undigested facts, and still the cruel, barbarous forcing goes on . . . They hurry the children into a hundred text books, then into ill health, then into the colleges, then into a diploma, then into life with a dazed mind, untrained and unfitted for living."

He is right. I endorse every word of it. There seems to be not much pick nor choice in the matter of what subjects our children must take up, the curriculum of study is planned out by an educational department, and whether desirable or otherwise, up to a certain point in their education the studies are universal. The public schools should see the end

of that, and in our higher institutions of learning, pupils should have more latitude, and be allowed to specialize, dropping those subjects which have no particular bearing on the calling in life they have decided to adopt. The lives of many girls are made miserable by the study of physics and mathematics, leaving them limited time for languages and the classical studies they would find useful in their future reading or travel, for so many of our daughters only take the course at their home colleges, not aspiring for professions, but to be fitted for social and domestic life. In my opinion algebras and scientific problems are an injustice to them, for they fret and fume over what will not be likely to assist them in writing a good letter, or solve the difficulty of cooking a dinner.

This applies to boys as well. There is no consideration whatever for their natural abilities, they are pushed through for something for which they are not adapted, and an unsuccessful life is the result. A boy is placed in a lawyer's office, who should be an electrical engineer, because the whole bent of his mind leans that way; and another is in a pulpit who would excel in commercial life. On every side these mistakes are obvious, men going through life handicapped, because their natural inclinations were stifled to satisfy the ambition of one or both parents, who have made a banker out of a splendid mechanic, or a shoemaker out of a genius who might have left his name immortal on the pages of history as a great military leader, or literary light.

PLEASE teacher, Jennie Allen Moore is holding up her hand, and this is what she is asking—

When school closes for the midsummer vacation, do not suggest that your classes read up such and such an author through the holidays, books that to their youthful minds are dry and musty, especially when out of school, and in the glorious summer days when everything invites them to the woods and the water, to the singing of birds and bright sunshine. Why do I ask it? Because to nine-tenths of the class it will rest like a pall over the weeks that should be lesson free, and at the eleventh hour they will race through the volumes, disgusted with the task, and a hatred for the books forever after, as the conditions under which they were forced to read them are recalled. The other tenth, with sturdy, conscientious resolve, will devote the first days of their holidays to disposing of the hateful task, and straightway dismiss and forget all about it in the happy weeks that follow. Instead, advise them after this fashion, "Now, children, when you take your books home to-night, carry them upstairs, right to the attic if you have one, and put them carefully away in a drawer or box, and bid them farewell until the day before school re-opens for the fall term. Have a good time, and come back ready for hard work."

And mother, do not insist upon the daily practice in music. Leave them exempt for the holidays, those hot July and August days when they feel so listless and disinterested. Some may *desire* to continue their music; kindly allow them a choice in the matter. And, please remember, that I practised what I preach all along the years, both in the matter of homework and music, and results were decidedly satisfactory. Do not look forward with dread to the weeks when the children will be on your hands. Get ready for a holiday with them, and be full of resources for the days when there is nothing special, and they are wondering what to do; rainy days when they will be shut indoors, when a little tea party in the play room, or a wild Indian hunt in the wood shed will render them supremely happy. Do not be too busy to help build a tent, or erect a play house, where they can pretend housekeeping. Soon, all too soon, the days will come when the sober duties of life will overtake them, and one of the sweetest memories will be the times they are now enjoying "round the old home tree." When they hear that sad little song, "In the house of too much trouble," they will not sigh over the words, and recall their own childhood, but will rejoice in the memory of a mother who was never too busy to listen to their troubles.

For the Guest's Comfort

HOSTESSES who look well to the comfort of their guests always have in every room a bountiful supply of note paper and correspondence cards, inscribed with the name of the house, the post office address and the telephone number—if there is one. Country house stationery may deviate somewhat from the conventional styles considered correct for town use, and if one chooses to use khaki brown note paper or robin's egg blue, or even coral pink, one's vagary will be quite excusable. The name of the house may also be printed at the top of the sheet when nothing less than engraving would be tolerated in town. Some hostesses provide postage stamps for their guests, but this is rather an expensive fad. Telegraph blanks should, however, be in every room, so that telegrams may be speedily dispatched when necessity arises.