

Let it be granted that it is a good and desirable thing that our school children should become familiar with the works of the best English writers. How is this to be brought about? Certainly very little can be done towards it in the short time we can give to the subject in school hours. But if we can give the children a desire to read for themselves, and show them how to do it, we have provided for their carrying on the work after teachers and school hours are left behind. Here we have an aim, then—to make the children like to read, and to teach them how.

The importance of the first point can hardly be exaggerated. Tastes are beginning to form, and if a child does not learn to love books during school days, the chances are that he never will, and only those who do love them, know the loss to his life. Better ignore literature, as such, altogether in our schools than have it handled in a way that will make it distasteful to the children.

No method can be formulated for cultivating a love of reading, but the teacher who cares for literature herself will soon find her pupils doing the same, and no teacher who does not care for it should try to teach it. Enthusiasm is catching; but it must be real enthusiasm, and children have sharp eyes for shams. They will soon know it if you really do not like what you are trying to persuade them they ought to.

There was once a teacher who made his class read Hamlet, without any explanation or discussion. They were very ordinary girls, from twelve to fifteen years old; the print was very fine; some of the reading was very bad, and the class were simply bored. The teacher was shocked and displeased with those who boldly said they did not like Hamlet; but those girls did not believe—one of them does not believe to this day—that that teacher ever read Hamlet for his own pleasure; they were quite sure that they would never read it for theirs, and they resented his expecting from them more appreciation than he showed himself.

A more honest instructor, who did not pretend to admire or to enjoy Wordsworth, put copies of "The Wanderer" into the hands of his pupils and required them to memorize and recite a certain portion each week, without question or comment. Some of them are still grateful that he made them store their memories with those noble lines and let them find the beauties for themselves. For pupils who had already a taste for good reading it was not a bad plan—at least there was no pretence about it; but for those others—and they are the many—who have to be brought to find out that great writers, even the greatest, have much to say that they can understand and enjoy, more delicate handling is necessary.

Experience tends to show that there will always be a few who cannot learn even this much. Even among people who are wide-awake and intelligent in affairs of every-day life, there are always some to whom books mean absolutely nothing; they are dead to what other people have said, if it has been written down. But there are many more of whom we feel that if they had only been brought into real contact with good books at the right time a happy influence would have come into their lives.

Many children who already love reading, and need no urging to read, need help to read wisely. See what Mr. Ruskin says, in "Sesame and Lilies," about reading a passage from Lycidas, and how much study it takes to read a book in his way, and then think how little light a child can get on his reading from his own limited knowledge and experience. A little practice will get him in the habit of connecting the thought in the book with his own thought, and save him from making the separation of books from life, so fatal to true enjoyment of reading.

The milk-and-water stories that children read weaken their power of attention, and it is surprising to find how few get a clear meaning from reading even a simple narrative in poetry. A class of girls, averaging thirteen years, and rather above the average in intelligence and application, were reading the lines—

"For I was near him when the savage yells  
Of Uther's peerage died and Arthur sat  
Crowned on the dais."

The sudden question, "Who died?" drew the general answer, "Uther's peerage."

Two general principles may be laid down: First, encourage every child, by every means in your power, to commit to memory all the good poetry possible; make the selections yourself at first, and only from the best writers; later on let them sometimes choose for themselves. The second rule is negative. Do not, on any account, let the literature lesson be handicapped by any system of marks or examinations.

ELEANOR ROBINSON.

An English schoolmaster once said to his boys that he would give a *crown* to any one of them who would propound a riddle he could not answer.

"Well," said one of them, "why am I like the Prince of Wales?"

The master puzzled his brains for some minutes for an answer, but could not guess the correct one. At last he exclaimed, "I am sure I don't know."

"Why," replied the boy, "*because I am waiting for the crown.*"