

Forming a Boy's Literary Taste

BY EDWARD TRELAWNEY.

HOW shall a boy be led to love good reading? Surely by his reading what is good. Modern biology shows that characteristics acquired by an adult during the course of his life are not inherited by his child. But the normal child starts with all the latent tendencies which lie dormant in the race. Which tendencies shall be first developed into activities? This depends on environment. Professor Darwin in his inaugural lecture last year, declared, before the British Association, that the one secure result of recent psychological research is the conviction that the adult mind is a social product, i.e., it is the product of re-action on environment.

GIVE BOYS THE BEST!

Taste depends on training. The tendency to love the best may be developed by giving the young boy, first of all, the best. But the *best* must be the best for *him*.

What literature is the best for a boy? Surely the literature which reflects the boyhood of a people will appeal to him. Such literature will be objective and concrete. It will not be reflective and analytic. It will give men and deeds. It will be the product of insight, but the insight will be the vision of the artist. The artist sees in this particular thing, or deed, or person.

The literature for a boy must be the product of a vision which sees truly, and which sees truly those things which a boy's imagination will embrace. In no case should it be introspective. It should not dwell upon mental processes. It should not moralize. The Bible narratives of the ancient Hebrews are dramatic rather than analytic. You see deeds resulting in certain issues. You see concrete men and women rather than psychological processes. George Eliot analyses the working of her victim's mind. The Bible simply concretely pictures the development of the person in word and deed.

A boy should feel, but not think of his feelings. He should frankly admire, but not too early question the reasons of his admiration. The boy will find his interest chiefly in actions whose motives are obvious and whose direct results are readily recognized.

So the first plea made is that the boy shall have, first of all, the best stories of the ages. May we trust humanity so far? Will the boy respond? The Hebrew mothers told the stories collected in our Book of Judges and produced from their nurseries a heroic race. The Greeks told their children their classic stories and the product of their homes has not yet lost its worth.

AN ACTUAL CASE.

But to a few words of actual experience—Here is a boy of eleven. He finds Ralph Connor tame, and can scarcely abide his obvious preaching. "Daddy," he says, "Connor is all right while he makes his men act, but after a time he begins to preach, and the book is not so good." A true criticism and based on sound artistic principles—from a boy of eleven. He will read Scott and Shakespeare, but turns from the average Sunday School Book with loathing.

At five years old he had heard the old Hebrew stories, and at that age there was read to him in Church's English version the story of Homer's Iliad. A year or so later he began his "Pilgrim's Progress," some of which—the formal reflections—he found meaningless; while the men in action spoke and lived for him. Another year and "Robinson Crusoe" held him spell-bound. By this time Hawthorne's "Tanglewood

Tales" and "Wonder Book" and Kingsley's "Greek Heroes" had found a warm welcome. One day at camp, when he was nine, he was lying on the sand, laughing aloud. He had stolen away with Shakespeare's "As You Like it," and "King Lear" followed. Charlotte Yonge's "Little Duke," Scott's "Ivanhoe," the stories of Robin Hood, Froissart's "Chronicles" and Edgar's "Cressy and Poictiers" made the beginnings of English national life mean something for him, and this paved the way for actual history.

Several biographies written for Juniors were tried, including some lives of missionaries; but on turning to Lockhart's "History of Napoleon." "Papa," said he, "Lockhart can write a man's life so that you feel you know the man"—an implied criticism on much missionary biography. Side by side with his school work in history he eagerly read Shakespeare's historical plays. Henty, of course, appealed to him, but he felt the superiority of the masters. Reading the work of artists he learns at least to see clearly. Thus he called attention to the fact that in "Ivanhoe" the relations of Saxon and Norman are much less cordial than Henty represents them, while in Robin Hood the enmity exists only towards Norman oppressors. The boy runs and fights, eats and plays, like any other normal boy.

RELIGIOUS BOOKS.

But one may ask what place was assigned to religious reading? The answer is that the inculcation of high ideals, the formation of a pure and lofty imagination, and the capacity to recognize a true from a false view of life—these are the best factors in the literary formation of a boy's religion. This experiment is reported as tending to show that a normal boy, with a few guiding suggestions, may be left to browse in a library of standard literature. If not artificially biased towards the weak and ephemeral religion he will speedily prefer the best. Distrust of a boy's capacity for the best is the cause of much real failure. Wesley's literary work was based on the ideal that his constituency—the lowest classes of England—would enjoy standard literature. The love of true portraiture of life is near akin to moral discernment and the discipline of conscience.

Do your best.

She is only a girl.

She may seem indifferent.

But she is not altogether thoughtless. Girls are the stuff women are made out of.

You may assist in the process and succeed well.

"Her children rise up and call her blessed," is true.

If you give right direction to a girl's mind now, you may be affecting a whole family in a few years hence.

The mothers of a coming generation are within our reach as the girls of to-day. Be true to them and the world must be the better for years to come.

Show the way.

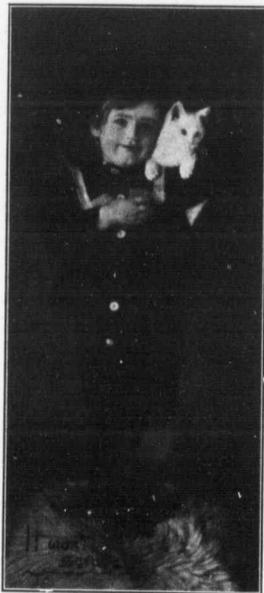
Don't simply tell of it.

What you do is more than what you say.

The child's ideal is what it sees in your life.

He can read you a long while before he can read the Bible.

It will be bad for both you and him if what he reads in the Book contradicts what he has already read in you.



"WE TWO"