



AROUND THE HEARTH

By JENNIE ALLEN MOORE.

"Come read to me some poem,
Some simple and heartfelt lay,
That shall soothe this restless feeling,
And banish the thoughts of day.

"Come read from the treasured volume
The poem of thy choice,
And lend to the rhyme of the poet
The beauty of thy voice."

OUR READING.

"One of the luxuries of life is the enrichment of our minds through the agency of good literature." I read that sentence the other day, and copied it, fully endorsing its sentiments, for no one who indulges in such a luxury will refute its truth. Good reading develops the mind, increases the mental capacity, and in youth strengthens the memory.

People do not read to the extent of their privilege. They will not take the time, but that is indeed a poor excuse for missing the inspiration which reading affords. Time is not lost nor wasted that is spent in educating the mind and filling it with the great thoughts of great writers. Reading is worth while for the pleasure and profit we derive temporarily, aside from the rich intellectual growth of knowledge it yields as a permanent expedient in mentality.

Much of our reading is superficial, caused by the number of papers, magazines, and books which come into our homes with such regularity that it seems necessary to merely skim over the pages. No one can deny that the newspaper is a great educator, and this sort of reading is a necessity. Our minds require the general information of current events, and although we give it but fleeting notice, it enables us to keep abreast of the times.

A newspaper is an ephemeral thing—yesterday's events being swallowed up in the fresh incidents of to-day. It is a medley of mixed doings and happenings—things irrelevant and apart—a hundred different topics with no connecting thread—a something to pick and choose from—a casting aside of items and feeling that nothing is missed—a selection of what pleases and gratifies the individual desire—this is the function of the newspaper.

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But books are different. You begin at the first and read right through. You do not want to miss even a paragraph. Should a leaf be missing it is regarded as a misfortune because the connecting link is gone. If the book is worth while—and no one who has little leisure should spend time reading books that are not worth while—then we want to re-read it many times. We become old and true friends, and we return to its pages still fascinated with the same old characters, just as we used to read again and again the stories we loved in our childhood.

"What book of all you have ever read did you enjoy most?" an old woman was asked.

"The first one," was the prompt reply. "It is as fresh in my memory to-day, as though I read it but yesterday."

Do you remember the first book you ever read? I do. It was not a fairy tale, exactly, but it bordered on the unreal, inasmuch as it described all the tiny dwellers in a small pond living as people in a community, conversing and visiting, and fighting their battles, the strong against the weak, the large overcoming the small. During my whole life I have never stood beside a pond or small stream wherein disport tiny creatures, squirming and wriggling, that my mind does not revert to that child's book with its large full type and short words, its fascinating pictures and alluring tales.

That I should ever have had any interest in that phase of animal life without having read that book is doubtful, as zoology never held much charm for me, and so it had enriched my mind, and left it open for other tales of a similar nature, which I took delight in reading to my children. The books read in childhood and youth leave deep impressions, and often serve to mould a life. I have heard the Sunday School libraries ridiculed as "goody-goody" books, and perhaps they did savor of some

such quality in the old days when I devoured every book in the library, but just the same there were ideals set up worthy of emulation.

Not long ago I read a sharp criticism on certain books written for boys by a popular author. The text of the censorious remarks was that the same story, differently set up, ran in all the books—a poor, good boy trying to help his widowed mother, and a rich, bad boy who persecuted him as tempter and bully. Then back of that was the bad boy's father trying to gain the widow's home by means more foul than fair. Of course some streak of good luck or unexpected fortune always turned up in time to save from the crash that seemed inevitable, and the book ended happily in rewarding the right and punishing the wrong.

Now, my boy had a library of fifty of those books, and for years he had revelled in the stories they told. Over and over again he read them, never seeming to tire of the wit and the sarcasm, the fun and the quarrels of these lads. I had read enough to notice the sameness complained of by the critic, but also recognized the author's intention of showing his youthful readers that there was compensation for the boy who walked in the path of right, and that sooner or later virtue would have its reward, and that the way of wrongdoing never leads to happiness.

Of course the time came when the lad no longer sought this library for entertainment, but I am certain it did him no harm, and has left, as the saying goes, even in regard to books, "a good taste in the mouth." It would not have been wise to have deprived him of his enjoyment in these characters he admired or spurned, and I believe it gave him a keener insight into human nature that will enable him to discern the real from the counterfeit.

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When I was young, people called me a book-worm. That was because I was always to be seen with a book. I did not deserve the title, for I was a very superficial reader in those days, and not addicted to deep study. To a Scotch family with whom I boarded for three years when I was teaching, I owe my ability to read understandingly. They made a habit of discussing the questions of the day at meal-time, and around the fireside. My habit of skimming over things had to be abandoned, in order that I might be capable of expressing my views with the rest. I discovered that it was necessary to be fully informed, and the habit of concentration acquired then has stayed with me. I do not read extensively, but try to follow closely, and mentally digest, what I do find time to read.

To say that one is a great reader, because he reads many books does not prove anything beyond the fact that he is fond of reading, and spends much of his leisure in that pastime, but may obtain very slight results.

There is an advantage in knowing how to read. Not that we mean knowing how to pronounce the words and understand the pauses, but to read comprehendingly, and to remember what is read well enough to converse about it intelligently.

In our reading it would be well to remember these words of Bacon—"Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested—that is, some books are to be read only in parts, others to be read but not curiously; and some few to be read wholly, and with diligence and attention."

One writer describes his plan of reading thus—"I glance over it first, then read it carefully, and usually make a study of parts of it, just as a student preparing a lesson," and I find that answers to my method very perfectly. I re-read much of it for the beauty of expression, for the well-rounded sentences, for the mastery of language, all of which appeals to my sense of appreciation.

No one book suits all persons, and no one author is every one's favorite. We are inclined to select from our own choice of style, which is not the wisest

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