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The Family Library

The Guide has decided to publish every little while during the winter months a little talk about good reading, and it was thought that this department could not be inaugurated better than by printing the following extract from an article on the subject written for Good Housekeeping, by Dr. Samuel Crothers:

The home library which gives the most pleasure is of gradual growth and representative of personal preferences. One book introduces another in an informal way.

"Let me make you acquainted with my good friend—" Of course we are happy to know him.

Let us suppose that Walter Scott frequents our living-room. The children know him and love him. It is quite natural that they should become interested in his friends and in his country. A volume of Scotch and English ballads finds its way into the library. "Ivanhoe" brings in a history of the Crusades. After hearing what Scott has to say about the Stuarts, we are curious to know what Macaulay thinks of them. And once Macaulay enters the living-room and begins to talk, there is no end to the people in whom he makes us interested.

Or we hear Scott telling how he heard John Wesley preach in the Kelso churchyard. Then we turn to Wesley's journals to find what he said about it. Of course, the old man did not notice the wide-eyed little boy who remembered the stories he was telling; we discover what an interesting revelation of life in the eighteenth century Wesley's journals give. The chances are that we make the acquaintance of half a dozen other books by the way.

Learn the Book Families

It does not so much matter where we begin; the important point is to recognize the relation of one book to another.

Listen to the conversation of persons from the same neighborhood who are talking over old times. How many sentences begin with pointing out family relations! "She that was a Simpson and married a Hopkins." "Old Deacon Strong's son by his first wife." It is by showing the relation of each to each that we "place" the people whose names are recalled.

Books are placed in the same way. We must know something about the date of their birth, their family relations, their bringing up, and their habits in life. Each belongs to a certain circle, and if we know one member of the circle we have a natural interest in the rest. Publishers know this, and if an author succeeds in interesting any number of readers in one book, he is in demand for another.

One Good Book Suggests Another

We are told that "Robinson Crusoe" is still one of the best sellers. Now suppose that one starts with "Robinson Crusoe." It is an introduction to real literature. Perhaps it is the story that attracts you. You will be drawn to the southern seas, with its copious literature of discovery and adventure. Or perhaps it is the intense practicality of "Robinson Crusoe" that appeals to you. The literature of self-help opens up before you. It is but a step to Benjamin Franklin, and Emerson's "Self-Reliance." Or it may be that you become interested in the author, Daniel Defoe. You want to know what other books he wrote. Now to get acquainted with Daniel Defoe is to plunge at once into one of the most exciting periods of English political and religious history.

The Roman citizens, when they wished to take part in the business of the city, naturally gravitated to the Forum. The Athenians, when they wished to hear or tell some news, found their way to Areopagus. The Venetian merchants made business appointments on the Rialto. There, too, they were sure to find the people with whom it was most worth while to converse.

So, in literature, there are books which serve as intellectual exchanges and spiritual trysting-places. And there

it is not merely the authors whom you meet, but the multitudes of readers of many generations. You are at a place where many paths cross.

The stay-at-home person is often surprised at the way in which the traveller in Europe will tell of the casual encounters with the same persons in all the great capitals of the Continent. But the coincidences are quite natural for all travellers visit the same great places. If two persons from Kankakee are in Rome at the same time, they are quite likely to meet under the dome of St. Peter's. If one takes his stand there, the other will be sure to turn up.

"Meet me at Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress." If you keep the appointment, you will meet a great many people besides John Bunyan. You will meet the people who have been brought up on Bunyan, and you will recognize them when they mention the Hill Difficulty, and Vanity Fair, and the Slough of Despond, and the Delectable Mountains. If you know your Bunyan, you will recognize his style when you come across it. You will know Abraham Lincoln, and how he came to write the Gettysburg address.

To get acquainted with Dickens is like joining a secret society. You are given the grip and the password which introduces you to many a chance acquaintance with whom, otherwise, you might have had nothing in common. If your initiation was early, it is all the better for you.

Let the Children Browse.

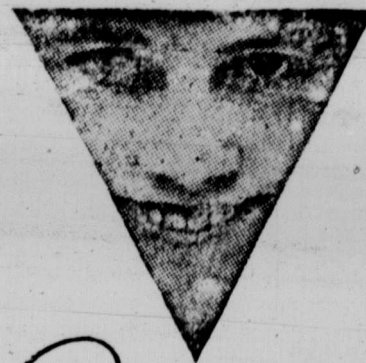
It does a child no harm to make the acquaintance of books which were not written for children. If they are formidable in appearance, he may find that inside they are not so very difficult after all. I am glad that in rummaging thru my grandfather's library I discovered Plutarch's "Lives" before anybody told me that it was one of the books I ought to read. Had Plutarch been put on a list of required reading, I should have looked upon it as a cruel and unusual punishment for a boy of twelve. But, as a matter of fact, it is easy reading to one who is able to read the historical books of the Bible. Plutarch did not "make company" of his worthies. He received them into a hospitable living-room. He says, "It is like living and conversing with these illustrious men whom I invite, as it were, and receive, one by one, under my roof."

Plutarch's men are worth knowing, and so are the modern men whose characters were molded by their influence. "Meet me at Plutarch," you say. There you meet the men who made constitutional government in England and America possible. They all knew the old moralist and the people he knew.

In a house where the great books which have inspired, or amused successive generations are get-at-able, an active-minded child is likely, at some time or other, to get at them. If he does not actually read them, he at least knows where to find them on occasion. Suppose that he has been accustomed to see an old illustrated volume of "Don Quixote," which evidently amused his elders. His notion of a work of humor will be different from what it would have been if the only accessible humor had been that provided by Mutt and Jeff. He may possibly discover that Cervantes had a greater pleasure-giving power than the artists of the comic supplements to the Sunday newspapers.

We know what an important part propinquity plays in friendship and love. If we want our children to fall in love with the better kind of books, let us provide them with opportunities for meeting such books without too much formality. A book in hand is worth two on a shelf; and the lower the shelf is the more likely the book is to be taken in hand.

And do not make a mystery of literary "taste." We read to please ourselves and not to please the critics. We are not reading to show off our culture. The cultivation of literary taste is as simple a matter as the cultivation of taste for food. You furnish your table with an abundance of wholesome,



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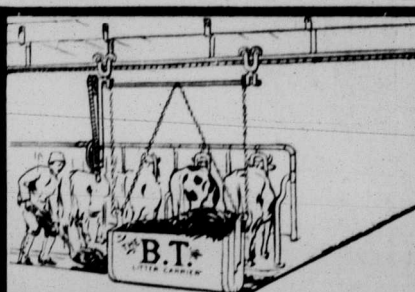
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