

Books in the Home

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IT is a sad sight to see a home without books. It shows a lack of culture in the family, and a serious defect in home training. When there are no books there is also an absence of the best agency to make up for the possible loss of school advantages. If the absence of a small library is due to poverty there is some excuse. When there is evidence of means, the lack of books is to be condemned. It too often happens that in the houses of well-to-do people there is little appreciation of good reading matter. Money is expended in dress, furniture and fine houses, but books are seldom purchased. It is one of the most incongruous sights to see an elegant house with fine furniture, paintings of the masters, valuable bric-a-brac, extravagant frescoes, expensive house-plants, and yet scarcely a standard work in the library. The sublimity of folly is reached when several massive volumes, with elegant illustrations, add to the costly array of furniture in the drawing-room of a family that possesses no taste for literature and no appreciation of the proper value of books. Indeed, such a condition has its amusing aspects, when books have been secured, but without any regard to their intrinsic merit. The binding of the books, which is sure to be costly, indicates that display and not real worth determines the choice.

The need of home libraries is felt more in the country than in the city. In rural districts, the opportunities for self-improvement are generally very limited. The young people seldom have access to public libraries and good lectures are rare. The taste for reading may not have been developed, owing to the short period of school life. If deprived of good books there is little chance of getting any intellectual food. The mental faculties are dwarfed, and farm life is wrongly assumed to afford no means of helping those who long for an education. Indeed, it is no wonder that so many foolishly abandon the effort to gain knowledge. A new suit of clothes, a handsome set of china, or a fine bicycle, is bought, but there is no thought of spending a few dollars in what would have much to do in the development of the intellect. One weekly paper is perhaps, considered enough literature for the whole family. A standard magazine would be an extravagance. The children have little chance of knowing what is going on in the world, or of getting information about the duties of citizenship. Even an agricultural journal is not provided, and it is apparently assumed that the tiller of the soil has no need of scientific knowledge regarding farming operations.

Children are not sufficiently impressed with the fact that good management is more valuable to the farmer than hard physical labor. It should be felt that it is the man of properly exercised brains that will hold his own in the country as well as in the town. The bad times which come frequently to the farmer render it imperative to have agriculture carried on in the future in accordance with the most approved methods. The farmer should be an observer, a reader, a thinker. After twenty years' experience his time should be worth far more than that of his hired man. The farmer who does not grow intellectually is without excuse.

Children should be trained to value their books, and to form little libraries for themselves. A book worth reading is worth preserving. The school books should be retained, and should become precious reminders of youthful days. The books one adds to his library from year to year may mark his intellectual and moral growth. The volumes purchased should be those that are intended to be used at the time. If passages are marked when read the books will be all the more serviceable to him who has thus made use of them. A public library can never meet the needs that are supplied by a private one. A certain class of reference books may doubtless be left to public libraries, but there is great advantage in having in the home such works as may readily be taken up when an opportunity is presented. For the ordinary citizen a great many books are not required. In the library of fifty or a hundred well-chosen volumes infinite riches may be found. Almost any boy or girl who tries may have, in a few years, a fair library. Only the best books should be selected, and one who reads judiciously can master several in a year.

To purchase a great many books is unnecessary. Not more than a thousand really first-class books are to be found in the

English language, and of these the greatest will not exceed one hundred. If teachers and parents will help children in selecting books, a taste for literature will be created and the nucleus of a private library formed, before school life is over. Care must be taken to prevent the taste for ephemeral novelties, however brilliant, from displacing the half-formed taste for literature of standard reputation.

The care of the home library should chiefly consist of keeping the books neat and accessible. Books that are locked up or kept in unfrequented rooms are deprived of half their usefulness. It is a good thing to find a book almost worn out with

Influence of Books

"The Voyages of Captain Cook" led William Carey to become a missionary.

"Shakespeare and the Bible," said Rev. John Sharp, "made me Archbishop of York."

Cotton Mather's "Essay to do Good" influenced the whole of Franklin's life.

Henry Ward Beecher said no man could read Ruskin's works and be the same again.

"The Life of Washington," which Lincoln borrowed from a neighbor in the wilderness and devoured by the light of the cabin fire, inspired his entire career.

The entire career of Tyndall was affected by Emerson's book on Nature.

Many a boy has gone to sea and become a rover under the influence of such books as Marryat's novels.

Multitudes of lads have been led into lives of crime by reading cheap sensational, but vicious books.

"It is nearly an axiom," says Bishop Potter, "that people will not be better than the books they read."

use if it has received proper treatment. It is better to have a book convenient for every day use, than to have it preserved like a stuffed bird in a glass case. Open shelves are better than glass-doored book-cases, and for a private library the original binding of a book is better than a brown paper cover. Plain substantial bindings are better than costly editions. The latter may be left for men who have lots of money, but not, perhaps, the highest appreciation of the intrinsic value of a book. One's books should be treated as companions, and proper care of them is expected. It is not necessary to spend much time in arranging one's private library. At the same time a knowledge of where the different volumes are to be found is advantageous. Books should not be piled in a crowded manner on the shelves, nor should they be placed flat-ways upon the top of those standing upright in the case. The advice given long ago by Richard De Bury is valuable, "Never to approach a volume with uncleanly hands."

Books are easily soiled, and if defaced their attractiveness is diminished. They should be frequently dusted and protected from dampness or impure air. They should become more precious as time goes on, and many happy memories should be called up by referring to their pages. By frequent intercourse with the sayings of a great author he should be esteemed all the more. To part with one's books should be like parting with one's friends. They should become some of the most valued treasures of the household, and should be bequeathed as precious legacies to the next generation.