

oak in the shadow of which they play is a throne, and the moss at their feet a carpet; in short, they live in a glorified realm of their own creation, diametrically opposed to every thing matter-of-fact, and yet strongly invested with common sense, as their readiness of invention and their fertility in expedients testify. It is the coloring of reality that imagination gives which renders impromptu plays of children so engrossing to the actors in their little *commodie a soyetto*, and it is the same coloring that renders all marvelous stories so fascinating to a fresh and healthy mind. Now, since the imagination is designed to be a source of profitable pleasure, it should be carefully trained; by which we do not mean that it should be subdued any more than that it should be unduly stimulated. Fairy-tales are good reading for children, because, by the hold they have on the imagination, they rivet the attention and strengthen that realizing power by which the mind retains whatever is read. Therefore it was with inexpressible dismay that we once saw an advocate of the matter-of-fact class of books consign to the flames the exquisite creations of Laboulaye, while he left in his daughters' hands one of those embryo novels so debilitating to the young mind; forgetting, while he condemned as nonsense stories so delicate, tender, and true as *The Four-leaved Clover*, that all fact is not truth, and all truth is not fact. The plea that children can not draw the moral of half these tales is simply absurd; we do not want moralizing children, we want children that can enjoy childish things, for that is the strongest surety we can have that they will be happy and good. We need not fear that the moral is lost upon such children; though it be slow to germinate, like good seed in good ground, it will eventually yield fruit, thirty-fold, sixty-fold, perhaps a hundred-fold. "None of us can foresee," says Bulwer, speaking of the moral effect of writers, "what great discoveries even in practical science may have their first germ in the stimulus given to a child's imaginative ideas by the personal of a work in which genius has made fiction truth-like, and the marvelous natural."

No doubt it is this apotheosis of fact that so often robs history of its charms for children. What do they care for "philosophy teaching by examples?" What they want is a story that will set their little hearts beating in sympathy. Children that read with the heart in the eyes will learn and retain far more than those who are forced to read for instruction and taught to judge according to an orthodox standard. "I have no heroes," said an unhappy little pedant of twelve to the writer; "I have observed"—she meant, poor child, that it had been pointed out to her—"that all great men have their weaknesses." How much healthier and stronger was the mind of another child I knew, who left to ponder alone upon what she read of her own free choice, made to herself a hero of Napoleon Bonaparte. She read over and over again every thing she could find concerning him; but she read only once the account of the battle of Waterloo, complaining bitterly that she could never forget one incident of that tremendous struggle. Children judiciously left to themselves, will generally read in this absorbing fashion. They may not indeed judge correctly, but they will at least think their own thoughts; and blind indeed must one be not to perceive that is better for the growth both of intellect and character than that passive submission of the understanding that accepts without weighing whatever it is told to accept.

It is wise to permit children a considerable degree of liberty; by which we do not mean license in the choice of reading. All character of any promise has strong traits of individuality which if thwarted in their natural development by undue or unsuitable restraints may be entirely destroyed, or may degenerate into deformities. You can not compel the sturdy shrub to climb like the graceful vine; and though you may by infinite pains and labor force some unhappy vine into the semblance of a shrub, you will gain only an artificial curiosity in the place of elegant drapery.

A child can gain no harm by choosing for himself out of a well-selected library that his elders delight in. He can be in no danger from reading books above his comprehension, for no one can persist in reading that to which he attaches no meaning; and the ideas above a child's comprehension are the very ideas by which his mind grows and expands; they are the footholds in the steps of knowledge by which he climbs to greater heights; and every body knows how much more conducive to growth,

health, or vigor is voluntary exercise than the prescribed "constitutional."

Religious books form no small portion of the literature for children, and while many of them are admirable in their design and influence, there are yet some among them that are not devoid of peculiarly objectionable features. Just as some books tend to cultivate pedantry, so others tend to inculcate hypocrisy; in neither case is it the intention of the author to teach false doctrine; but the tendency is, notwithstanding, none the less sure and none the less deplorable. We do not mean to depreciate religious reading for children; what better books can we put into infant hands, what better story can we tell to infant ears, than "Pilgrim's Progress from this world to that which is to come?" But we do condemn that kind of religious reading that works upon the terrors of the young; that talks incessantly of punishment and wrath, and pains even the love of the Father toward his creatures in colors so somber that children learn to esteem heaven but as the alternative of hell. Do not some of us recall even now with a sinking of heart a dread picture of the hands of wicked boys stretching helplessly above the roaring waves; of disobedient children lost in some forlorn waste and devoured by wild beasts? One child may learn vindictiveness and another may learn hypocrisy from such stories, according as their temperament inclines to boldness or timidity; but trust in God's abounding love and tenderness books of this kind can never teach.

Another class of these books holds up impossible examples of saintly childhood—impossible, that is, for hardy, healthy children, as prone to mischief and naughtiness as the sparks are to fly upward. Children that become saints dio early, and piety such as theirs is scarcely attainable by children endowed with vitality sufficiently strong to carry them safely through all the ills that flesh is heir to. Nor did God ever design that this should be so. No doubt, in his mercy and justice, he gives a larger measure of grace to the feeble sufferer as compensation for those buoyant animal spirits he bestows upon the little creatures destined for active service in the world. While therefore the life of such children may be beautiful and wholesome, as a story to win the sympathies of hardier children, it is pernicious to assist upon making them an example. Children are acute reasoners upon practical topics within their comprehension, but they reason only on those points which touch themselves, and therefore they reason narrowly. The moment a child blessed with vigorous health attempts to lead the religious life of some little invalid saint he finds that such a life is not possible for him, and he consequently argues that it is not possible for any one, and thus he learns to doubt the attainment of holiness.

Yet other books there are of this class so tame, so vapid, so full of common-place "preach," that happily few children can tolerate them; but the few that do derive no benefit from them. Children are instinctively reverent and humble unless a false education destroy these qualities; and they do not need to be fashioned into religion through the medium of alternate fasts and bonbons, prayers and picnics, held up as the practices and rewards of the pious. The sanctimoniousness engendered by this kind of reading is not only antagonistic to the innocent spirit of childhood, but is subversive of all pure religion.

A paramount objection to much reading of religious books is that they supersede the Bible, the stories of which are so attractive to children, not only from their intrinsic merits, but from that vague yet endearing mystery with which the infant imagination invests the Book of God.

In directing the reading of children many persons make the serious mistake of pointing out beauties by way of leading the young mind to appreciate the beautiful. To appreciate the beautiful is certainly a most desirable attainment, but it must be an honest and spontaneous appreciation to produce the desired effect upon the character. Children can admire from a mere sense of obedience, and thus run the risk of becoming automatic characters; but if wisely left to themselves they are apt enough to discern beauty in nature, in literature, or in art; for truly has it been said that "beauty needs no showman." The only difference between a child's discernment in these matters and an adult's is the perfectly natural difference between maturity and immaturity that time and a judicious culture will rectify. The only safe