

PASTOR AND PEOPLE.

WHAT BOOKS SHALL THE CHILDREN READ?

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This great fact must not be lost sight of, that among the potent educational forces of the home, next to the life and teaching of the parents is the silent, subtle, and all-pervading influence of the books that are read by the children. There is, as Frederick Denison Maurice has finely put it, a friendship of books, and that, too, to none more real, and living, and enduring than to children. What they read creates for them a spiritual world, which becomes every way more to them than the actual world in which they are living. The characters, the actions, the scenes, the sayings, enter as elements into their life: they imprint themselves on their memory, and dwell in their imagination and exercise a prevailing power upon their actions. The reason of this has been wisely given by John Milton in these words: "Books are not absolutely dead things, but do contain a progeny of life in them to be as active as that soul was whose progeny they are; nay, they do preserve as in a vial the purest efficacy and extraction of that living intellect that bred them. I know they are as lively and as vigorously productive as those fabulous dragon's teeth—and being sown up and down may chance to spring up armed men. And yet, on the other hand, unless wariness be used, as good almost kill a man as kill a good book; who kills a man kills a reasonable creature—God's image; but he who destroys a good book kills reason itself—kills the image of God, as it were in the eye."

Illustrations of this indestructible energy of books are not wanting. Samuel Johnson tells us of Cowley, that "In the window of his mother's apartment lay Spenser's 'Faery Queen,' in which he very early took delight to read, till by feeling the charms of verse, he became, as he relates, irrecoverably a poet." Richard Baxter informs us of the value of certain books to him. Being under spiritual concern, a poor man in the town lent his father an old torn book, entitled, "Bunny's Resolutions." "In reading this book," he observes, "it pleased God to awaken my soul, and shew me the folly of sinning, and the misery of the wicked and the inexpressible weight of things eternal, and the necessity of resolving on a holy life, more than I was ever acquainted with before. The same things which I knew before came now in another manner, with light, and sense, and seriousness to my heart. After this, Dr. Sibb's 'Bruised Reed,' and Perkins's 'Of Repentance,' and 'The Art of Living and Dying Well,' and 'The Government of the Tongue' did further inform me and confirm me. And thus *without any means but books*, was God pleased to resolve me for Himself."—*A Schoolmaster at Moulton*. It was the perusal of "Cook's Voyages," while instructing his pupils in geography, that led William Carey to contemplate the moral and spiritual degradation of the heathen, and to form the design of communicating the Gospel to them, which was afterward so heroically carried out. The reality of Wilberforce's "Practical View" led the great Dr. Thomas Chalmers out of legal bondage into the liberty of the sons of God, and he was henceforth a new man. This celebrated book did the same for Leigh Richmond, who wrote the "Dairyman's Daughter," which has been a fountain of life to many souls. Illustrations of the life-giving power of books, of how they determine and control the entire course of those who read them, are almost numberless. And their effects upon the minds of children are deeper and more lasting than upon grown men, and that with this peculiarity, they are less pronounced. If a man reads a book that exercises a decisive influence upon him, it forms an epoch in his life, but if a child does that it is unobserved, because there is little yet with which to make a contrast, and the life of the book is received as freely and unthinkingly as the air that it breathes. And it is this very fact that ought to make parents and guardians exceedingly careful that only good books shall be used by their children.

But what kinds of books are good books? Answering generally: books that are pure in thought, and that will quicken in their minds high, noble, and generous conceptions; books that are wise and true, and that will give to them right views of the world, and healthy views of life and duty; books that are full of

instruction, and that will inspire them with courage to act manfully, and worthily, and heroically in the presence of difficulties and antagonisms. Every book they read ought to be a fount of inspiration to do right, to think wisely, to speak truthfully, to live well, and at length to die happily. Isaac Walton of "The Complete Angler," felt this when he inserted in his will this clause: "To my son Isaac, I give Dr. Sibb's 'Soul's Conflict,' and to my daughter his 'Bruised Reed,' desiring them to read them so as to be well acquainted with them."

Books for children must have a charm about them to win them and keep them reading. They must interest: hence the wonderful magic a story has upon the minds of both young and old. It chains them fast. What books excel in this? "The Pilgrim's Progress" and "Robinson Crusoe." Would that all the children read had the same charm! Dr. James Hamilton, of London, had for a long time in his mind a scheme for writing the history of the Church of Scotland, something on the plan of Sir Walter Scott's "Tales of a Grandfather," for young people. "For," he said, "if that history could be learned in the nursery or at school, it might do something to forestall the present spirit of indifference or hostility toward our kirk, and perhaps something more." This scheme, we regret to say, was never carried out. Had it been done, it would have been very attractive, as much so as a fairy tale.

Mrs. Charles, in her "Schonberg Cotta Series," has done good service in this department. She has, with great taste, and tenderness, and skill dealt with the times of Whitfield and Wesley, Luther, Oliver Cromwell, and the Pilgrim Fathers, and Alfred the Great. Few books are so charming as hers. All the principal events in the history of the Church might be treated of in the same sympathetic spirit, and with the same judicious calmness. And all the great doctrines of Christianity, the principles of moral philosophy, the discoveries of science, and the most common points of civil law, might be so woven into the web of a story that they would find entrance into the minds of the young, and through the fascination of the story, be fixed there forever. With these subjects they ought to have as early an acquaintance as possible.

Agesilaus, the Spartan king, when asked what boys should learn, admirably answered: "That which they must use when they are men." That is a sound principle of education and applies to all children. Jean Paul Richter says, in answer to the question, What is the best kind of stories for children? "Oriental and romantic tales seem the most suitable, such as many of the 'Arabian Night's Entertainments,' Herder's 'Palm Leaves,' and Krummacher's 'Parables.' Children are little Orientals. Dazzle them with the wide plains of the East, with brilliant dew-drops and bright-tinted flowers. Give them, at least in stories, the impulse which shall carry them over our cold northern rocks and north capes into the warm gardens of the south. Let your first miracle be, like Christ's, a turning of water into wine, of fact into poetry."

This is being done, more than ever before, by many excellent writers: done slowly, but with amazing success. For it must be remembered that writing to children is like talking to children, one of the most difficult undertakings. Yet, take as a sample of successful writing to children, and that, too, on the most abstract and momentous themes, those little books of Frances Ridley Havergal, entitled, "Morning Stars, or Names of Christ for His Little Ones;" "Little Pillows, or Good-Night Thoughts for the Little Ones;" "Morning Bells, or Waking Thoughts for the Little Ones." These are little talks, so sweetly said, so plain, so pointed, altogether so winsome, that we can think of nothing better for the children as a Christmas box, or New Year's present, or birthday gift, with a request to them to read them, as they were written to be read, daily. Children's books of the right kind are multiplying fast, the London and New York religious tract societies, and many first-class publishing houses are doing their best to supply the demand for wise, loving, truthful, wholesome literature for the little ones.

There is no doubt that many miserably poor, and often actually poisonous, stories have been written for the children; stories full of wrong views of God, and life, and duty, and human relations; stories which have debased the mind, and hardened the heart, and embittered the life; stories which have fallen on their souls like a blight. Watch has to be kept against any such being read by them. The discovery that Bis-

marck made on his way to Paris, of school books filled with lies, which he called the saddest sight he saw in France; and the discovery Joseph Cook made in Boston of the same character, school-books full of the boldest violations of historical veracity, and passages plainly intended to inflame uneducated readers—all by Roman Catholic priests—are but instances of a work that is widespread—the falsification of all the great truths on which our life and our hope are built; and which are set forth in the most charming way. Parents must watch zealously against the entrance of any of these, in whatever guise, into the home. They are destroyers of spiritual life and peace. This work is done most effectually when good books are selected and commended by the parents themselves. Children should not be at liberty to read anything and everything. The motto should be, "Only choice food for mind and soul."

TWO MORE PRODIGAL SONS.

The last New York paper received contains the story of a prodigal son, reminding me of another that I was sadly interested in a year or two ago. Both of them bring us into sympathy with broken-hearted parents. And both have lessons that ought to sink into the hearts of young men and warn them to shun the beginnings of evil. First, let me rehearse this fresh tragedy. I will not mention names, because they may be read by loving friends and make their wounds bleed again.

PRODIGAL NUMBER ONE.

In the latter part of May last, a young man left the home of his parents in Scotland and came to the city of New York, where he arrived on the 8th June. Taking a room at a hotel, he proceeded at once to make himself drunk. He would become only sober enough to call for more liquor. The managers of the respectable hotel supplied him freely for several days. When it was found that he would have nothing else he was refused more, and he managed to get it from outside. This went on from the 8th to the 18th of June, the young man being intoxicated most of the time, and his money being nearly all gone. Then he was ordered to leave. The young man now awoke to his terrible condition, and, without waiting to be turned adrift, he killed himself. In his possession, and stained with his own blood, were found two letters. One was from a lady to whom he was engaged to be married. It was full of tenderness and love; written on the eve of his leaving his home and country to begin a new life in the new world. She reminds him of his infirmity, and implores him to resist it and get the victory. The other letter was signed by both of his parents: pious Scotch parents, who fear God and desire their son to be kept in His fear. I think this letter is worthy of being read by parents and sons:

My dear John,—Your dear mother and I are about to part with you for a time. It may be in the inscrutable decrees of Divine Providence that we shall never meet again on earth, and we wish to give you our parting blessing. You are about to take your departure from your native shores, and, if spared, to dwell among strangers in the land of your adoption. We hope and pray that God may guide and sustain you in all your wanderings, leading you to put your trust in Him as your guide and protector, asking Him at the throne of grace to sustain you and keep you from evil, and make you a useful member of the community in which you dwell, and an earnest, Christian, disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ. Study your Bible; read it morning and evening. Keep the Sabbath day holy to the Lord, abstain from all appearance of evil, and pray to God for His blessing on your every day life. Put your whole trust in Him, ask forgiveness for all past offences, and in His strength you can do all things. We freely forgive you all. Never again shall we mention your past history. You have a new field before you. Go on in the strength of the Lord, and He will sustain and uphold you in all your doings. In the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength. In this world we shall have tribulations and many things seemingly hard to endure, conflicts without and fears within, but we must meet them and face every difficulty with courage and perseverance—not in our own strength, for then all must fail, but in the promises of God and in the strength of His almighty arm, for hath He not declared: "In this world ye shall have tribulations, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world;" and when we have finished our pilgrimage on earth, and when our work of warfare is