

AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE THE ABERDEEN ASSOCIATION, WINNIPEG, JANUARY,
1895, BY GERTRUDE ADAMS FISHER.

*Madam, President, and Ladies of the
Aberdeen Association:—*

It would be a bold deed for the stranger at your door to venture any information regarding a work so near to your hearts, so unique in purpose, so successful in operation, so far reaching in influence. It was natural that I stood agast before your worthy President's suggestion to present a paper. But when she added "Surely you can speak to us on profitable reading," I felt that it was but chatting with you of the friends I loved, and why I loved them, to accept her kindly invitation.

A band of worthy women, working with a noble leader, to scatter light in dark places, to keep the distant children of the prairie in touch with the onward march of life that throbs and pulsates at the centres, may rightfully look for God's richest blessing on their work.

Truly, "A faith in something and an enthusiasm for something, make something, make life worth living." But the interests which control our lives are manifold. We belong to an era of intellectual activity. The value of education is universally accepted. No sane man pleads for ignorance, nor doubts that "Knowledge is power." The history of nations proves it. We may have educational hobbies. We may differ regarding subject and method, but we would all demand breadth and culture along some line.

Whatever our specialty, the library is the most potent factor of our work: and we may not realize how fully we are exponents of our reading. From first to last, books are a mighty influence in our lives. They are the friends of childhood. They furnish the castles and dreams of youth. They offer the comfort and consideration of age. They are the formative force of the world, the working power which moulds the individual and the national life. They establish the church and revolutionize the state. Religions strengthen and thrones weaken before the power of the pen. What a rare legacy is this field of book lore! How the volumes teem with the best brain of a ripe age and a thinking world; often with the very heart's blood of those earnest souls who are agonizing to uplift humanity. How the books plead, trumpet tongued, the experience of all ages. Standing by the great Clarendon Press as the leaves of the precious Oxford Bible are rolled out, one feels that the printer has his hand upon the lever which moves the thinking world. We are bound to be readers, and live with books. The momentous question becomes one of choice. What class of silent friends are we admitting to our hearts and homes? With time so precious, with life's earnest work before us, with our burning need for strength and wisdom to perform it, dare we make a frivolous choice, dare we choose any but the brave and helpful? As self-respecting women, we are forced to choose our books as we would choose our friends, that they may elevate and not degrade us. If life is full of carking care, and we have but a few hurried moments stolen from household duties, are we not morally responsible that brain shall be stimulated, hope quickened, aspirations lifted by the best the world affords? It is the earnest, thoughtful, serious friend who is restful and helpful, who renews our hope, and inspires our faint purpose and bids us be brave and loyal through the conflict. We find in her a tower of strength, for she is God-inspired. Our books are the friends of solitude and private life. We may think to kill time,—God's precious boon to man—with the trashy, sensational story, but