

Selected Articles

THE TEACHER'S READING

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One summer, a few years ago, I attended an institute in a city where an ice cream parlor and a book store faced each other from opposite sides of the street. The caterer did a flourishing business; waiters hurried about with their orders, and the cash register clanged busily; groups of teachers waited their turn at the tables. Across the way trade was very quiet, with only an occasional straggler to inspect one of the best stocks of books to be found in the state. Toward sunset the street cars were crowded with teachers bound for a suburban park, where they passed the evening in chuting the chutes, and bumping the bumps. All this gave food for reflection on one of our live questions.

After all nothing else quite so clearly indicates what men really are, and wish, as the manner in which they spend their spare time and money. The moil and toil of earning the daily bread may hold them in line with an iron hand, at the plow-handle, before the forge, or behind the desk or counter. But, after the whistle blows, or the clock strikes, they are free to follow their own inclinations; and we, as teachers, may well ask ourselves what use we make of this fine part of life.

Without question we give a considerable portion of this leisure to reading; but what do we read? It would be dangerous, of course, to draw an indictment against a whole profession; but are we not safe in declaring that altogether too much time is spent on the Red Book; and the Chicago Daily Slush? Furthermore, the roll of teachers owning any considerable number of good books is, according to all I can gather, lamentably small. Were it not for the prodigality of certain publishers in distributing sample copies, most of us could show libraries but

little larger than that of our fellow pedagogue, Ichabod Crane, whose literary possessions, we will recall, were limited to a dream book and Cotton Mather's discourse upon witches.

Of course, I recognize the teacher's salary check is lean and modest, and that the demands made upon him are out of proportion to his income. But let us also remember that, somehow or other in this world, we are very likely to get whatever we wish with our whole hearts—wish and work for till dreams come true. Emerson puts the matter thus: "Men are ever praying, and their prayers are being continually answered." Let me give an illustration of what I mean by praying with the whole heart. A few years ago there was a student in one of my classes who was earning practically every dollar that paid her way through college. This young woman not only earned her way, but she also found time and money for books, so that at her graduation she probably had a better library than almost any other member of her class. One day I chanced to see her, when she thought herself unobserved, place lovingly to her cheek her latest purchase—a beautiful, limp-leathered Temple Shakespeare; and I wondered how many people ever make any such pinching sacrifice for books and know the full measure of joy it brings.

To help form the habit of regular book buying, one may well celebrate one's birthday each month by ordering at least one volume. What a pleasure to watch the growing row of books spread across the empty shelf, to see it overflow, and then start another line! Somehow those books we own become members of our family, our friends and familiars, while those from the public library remain aliens—our