

What Is Your Boy Reading?

“Oh, he reads everything he can get hold of—novels, story papers, sea voyages, robber exploits, pirate yarns, and everything to make him discontented with his home, sick of his work, and ready for any sort of crazy adventure.”

But what have you given your boy to read, which has left his mind open for such occupation as this? Let us look over the book shelf. Here are patent office reports, agricultural documents, dissertations on bugs and beetles, pages of statistics concerning corn and swine, “public documents” which the farmer gets because they are given away and cost him nothing; all very important no doubt, but not the most interesting reading for young persons. Then here are political and sectarian newspapers, containing some wheat and not a little chaff, gospel in fine print, and staring advertisements of patent purgative pills, compound cure-alls; exhortations to repentance and remedies for itching piles side by side; and these are not what usually attract the attention of the young and rising generation.

There is many a father who has a good house, fine barn, well-stocked farm, and money at interest, who has not a dozen books in the house worth reading. An intelligent child would read on the average at least twenty ordinary volumes in a year, without interfering with his usual duties. Of course those books should not be the thrilling compounds of love and murder, blood and thunder, which once taken up cannot be laid aside until they are finished, and which people sit up in bed till past midnight to read; nor should they be the average novel, nor the goody goody, wishy-washy Sunday school tale, of which you can read a score without gaining a new thought or finding a new fact; but something sensible, instructive, and interesting, which gives the mind matter to think of, and the tongue something to talk about when the hands are employed; which can be taken up and laid down again without sitting up all night to see how it comes out, and which will instruct, encourage, and profit those who read.

Twenty five such well-chosen books purchased every year, and costing perhaps a few shillings each, would keep a family out of mischief, cultivate a taste for good reading and a loathing for trash, and in ten years would give children more help in the line of education than they could obtain for five times the cost in schools, which after all do little more than teach children how to study and read outside; and would give a family such a start in general education, information, and fitness for the duties of life as could never be obtained by mere academic training. Children would thus be taught lessons of

wisdom, intelligence, virtue, and purity, and the whole expense of the operation would be less than many a man has gladly paid to get a wayward son or daughter out of some dirty scrape into which they had been led by the wretched trash which they had devoured because their parents provided nothing that was really fit for them to read, as lambs eat laurel leaves when the snows cover up the grass.

It is not enough to say to a child, you should not read this, or you must not read that. The better way is to surround children with plenty of safe and proper reading, and then a gentle hint will serve to restrain them from the wrong and guide them in the right path.

Books are silent teachers, and there is no other method of instruction so cheap; and it is not easy to find any method more important, or more fruitful of good results. Give your children something to read that is worth reading, and avoid the shame and misery which a child left to himself is sure to bring upon those who have neglected him.

The time occupied in reading a book is worth more than the money spent in buying it. Many a child has wasted years in reading books full of wishy-washy drivel and half-baked fancies, which have left them soft, silly, sappy, and full of romantic nonsense, when a small sum of money invested in good, pure, healthy literature, would have endowed them with knowledge, good principles, solid facts, sound judgment and common sense. Children will read, give them something worth reading; they will learn, give them something worth learning. More books in the library and fewer pigs in the pen, may mean less money and more brains, a smaller stock of dumb beasts and a far better grade of sons and daughters—clear-headed, strong-handed and pure-hearted, ready to serve their God and serve their generation by his will.

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