THE BOOKLOVERS OF TOMORROW

It is not only the booklovers of today to whom we must give thought. What of the booklovers of tomorrow?

Practical education, so-called, must not be allowed to displace the ideals which literature inspires. The soul is as important as the body. The motion-picture is an established institution, but careless contemplation of the screen must not supplant the thoughtful reading of a book.

These are vital matters if we are to avoid national deterioration.

The work of creating intelligent book-readers must be sympathetic and universal, not spasmodic or detached. Prominent educators welcome the cooperation of THE BOOKMAN *in a constructive effort to foster genuine appreciation of literature in the minds of the rising generation.*

TEACHING LITERATURE

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I AM in full sympathy with the effort of THE BOOKMAN to develop among boys and girls the habit of reading good literature. I do not believe that the moving-picture or anything else can take the place of it. The moving-picture can present to the eye only such things as may be seen without its help. The purpose of literature, however, is not so much to present facts as it is to interpret life. The moving-pictures themselves need interpretation of the kind that can be given only through words. Most of the attempts to present literature through the film have not been successful. Moving-pictures, like still pictures, are necessarily particular and concrete. The spoken word moves from the particular and concrete to the general and abstract. I think it might well be claimed that the coming of the moving-picture makes the teaching of good literature still more important. Good teachers of literature, of course, will depend largely on the moving-picture for assistance, as they have always depended on other forms of visual illustration.

If the coming of the moving-picture and its various uses in education have tended to lessen the efforts of schools, libraries, and other agencies to promote the study of literature, I do not know it. If anywhere the tendency has been in this direction it is greatly to be deplored. On the other hand, schools and other similar agencies should be stimulated by the moving-picture and should find it helpful in the promotion of the study of literature.

From the beginning of the establishment of schools in this country, reading has occupied a more or less important place in the daily programs of schools of all grades, particularly of the elementary and grammar grades. In fact, the general use of literature of the best kind, selected rather than

made for the schools, has resulted in a new type of standard grade readers. Nearly all of these include large amounts of the very best literature of the world, either in its original form or retold. The reading of the high schools has been modified and directed very largely by the so-called college requirements in English. The first efforts in this direction were, I believe, not very wise. The requirements were made up of large extracts from the type of literature which college professors considered of most value for freshmen and sophomores, as for instance, the two books from Milton's "Paradise Lost", the Sir Roger de Coverley Papers, etc. Most of them did not appeal either in substance or in form, to the interests of boys and girls of high school age and advancement. The fact that the whole poem or story was not included also detracted from their value. A piece of good literature is a work of art, and has its beginning, its middle, and its end; its foreground, its background, and its atmosphere; and deserves to be treated as a whole and not in broken fragments. It is only as a whole that it lives. The life blood does not circulate well through the broken parts. Recent efforts in revising these requirements have recognized these principles and are far more successful than the earlier ones.

I think it is also true that the methods of teaching literature have greatly improved within the last decade or two. At first there was a strong tendency toward pedantry, to overanalysis, to the use of notes, to the habit of pressing one's nose against the window panes of the author, prying into matters that have little or no bearing on the literature itself. The teaching was about rather than of literature. Teachers disregarded the spirit of Bacon's saying about the need for a book to be called "The First Runnings of the Scriptures". When gently pressed, grapes yield a delicious fluid, but when pulp and seeds are ground between the teeth they yield an acrid, bitter juice. The same is true with literature. All literature deserves to be read first for pleasure and its first-hand teachings, as the great authors have intended their works should be read. Again, teachers seem to fear that children cannot understand great literature, but can only understand the descriptions, interpretations, and notes of the scholars. They seem to have forgotten that great literature is great because it takes hold on the things that are eternal, upon the experiences common to all—life and death, joy and sorrow, hope and despair, love and hatred—and that literature is great and lives because of the fact that it treats these things of life in words and phrases that can be understood by all, illustrated from the common things of nature and of universal experience. Children and teachers have given to introductions, interpretations, explanations, annotations, the time which might much better have been given to real literature. They might well have learned a lesson from the man who says he likes to read the Bible occasionally because it throws such light on the commentators. It is, of course, true that all the best literature is simple in form, the language serving its legitimate function of clear, forceful, and beautiful expression of thought and feeling rather than obtruding itself on the attention of the reader. Because of the misunderstanding of the purpose and of the methods of teaching literature in the schools, much time was given to examinations, and these examinations usually had refer-

ence to the accidental rather than to the essential.

I believe the practices in these respects have improved much in recent years. Teachers understand better the purposes of literature. They are freer from the fear of examinations either in their own schools or in the higher schools for which they are preparing boys and girls. It is only in this way that the best results can be had in forming tastes and habits for good reading which will be of most use to boys and girls when they have left school.

Public libraries have, either through direct cooperation with the schools or through their own efforts and methods, done much in recent years for the promotion of good reading among boys and girls. Many of them, probably most, now have children's rooms which are well supplied with the best books for children. Many of these books are well and beautifully illustrated. Lists of books for children of different ages and tastes have been carefully compiled. Books of this kind are bought in sets so that many children may read the same book at the same time. Story hours have been arranged and expert story-tellers have introduced children to good literature in the way that the race was introduced to it—through the spoken word. It is true, of course, that all good stories of the world have grown up in this way and were handed down from generation to generation long before they were put into book form. Children hear these stories much more effectively than they read them. This form of presentation of literature is also much used in the schools. The National Story-Tellers' League has been very effective in promoting this method of teaching, and it has been extended to circles of older boys and girls and groups of men and women. Circulating libraries and public school libraries have brought to children in the villages and open country many good books other than those required to be read in the schools.

Reading circles and courses of reading have been arranged by many agencies. The Bureau of Education has for several years been preparing and publishing courses of reading for boys and girls and for men and women. These courses have been made with the help of some of the ablest men and women of the country, and have made a wide appeal. Many thousands of men and women in all parts of the country are reading for the certificate that is given for those who satisfactorily finish the courses. The reading of many hundreds of thousands has been affected more or less by them. Public libraries have posted them on their bulletin boards. Circulating libraries have bought and circulated the books in such way as to promote the use of these courses in villages and rural communities. High schools have used them in guiding the reading of their pupils.

What has been done is very encouraging, but it is only a beginning. Much remains to be done. All thoughtful educators will agree that nothing more important or helpful can be done for boys and girls in school and out than to assist them in forming good reading habits and such a taste for good literature as will enable them to direct their reading wisely. Most of the text-books used in school are discarded and largely forgotten when boys and girls leave school and begin the work of life. The subject-matter of the lessons is also largely forgotten. Teachers are of two kinds, first-hand teachers and second-hand teachers.

We who teach in the schools belong mostly to the second class. We have little of our own to teach the children. We use our efforts to compel the children to go to school to the makers of the text-books, who themselves are largely second-hand teachers. First-hand teachers are those who have something of their own to teach to their fellows—men and women who have stood on the mountain tops and caught the glow of the ever-dawning new day; those who are a little more finely organized than the rest of us and have felt the heart-throb and the pulse-beat of humanity as we cannot; those who have listened to the still small voices and have interpreted for us the eternal verities; those who have pushed back the walls of darkness, who have wrought in the quarries of the unknown and given definite form to that which was without form. If the teachers of the schools fail to introduce their pupils to these first-hand teachers, the teachers of the race, then they fail in their highest opportunity and duty.

If boys and girls leaving school at fifteen years old, having formed the habit of reading and knowing how to select their books, read four good books a year for the next twenty-five years, they will at the age of forty have read a hundred good books. Men and women who have read carefully and well one hundred of the best books of the world are not uneducated. They know most of the best that has been done and said, and will be responsive to and appreciative of the best in thought and action. A community of such men and women may be appealed to for any good cause with the expectation that they will respond intelligently, enthusiastically, and with good judgment.