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Shall we content ourselves with putting on the shelves good books which the children will *not* read, or shall we yield to the demand, and supply exciting and unnatural stories, trusting that some other influence will counteract the effect of such reading?

May we not just here take a hint from the boy himself. It is at this time in his life that he is all absorbed in the physical enjoyment and excitement of living. The things around him press on all sides for attention. This great, live world besets him everywhere. If now, before his taste is spoiled, we can give him bright, crisp narratives of real life and adventure, can tell him what men and boys have done already in Arctic Sea or Great Desert, on mountain heights or in depths of forests, he will not need to seek for fictitious adventure.

Again, the last few years have given us books of natural science, by masters in their special departments, so clear in statement, so fascinating in detail, and so wonderful in revelations, that the child's natural love for the marvelous may find all-sufficient food, while he is at the same time storing up material for the man's use.

May not this be the true mode of warfare against poor and vicious books? Not trying to root out or to utterly suppress the boy's natural instincts and tastes, but taking advantage of them to fight bad books with good ones, the poor products of untrained human invention and imagination with the best records human wit and wisdom can give us of the various manifestations of everlasting truth.

The best is none too good for our children, and a taste for the best is the surest safeguard against what is bad. We owe it to the young people to do for them what they cannot do themselves, and by careful criticism and selection to protect them from the danger which they cannot yet see.

THE EVIL OF UNLIMITED FREEDOM IN THE USE OF JUVENILE FICTION.

BY MISS M. A. BEAN, LIBRARIAN OF BROOKLINE (MASS.) PUBLIC LIBRARY.

IT has been the pleasure of your committee to invite me to contribute something to the consideration of the subject of juvenile fiction in libraries, and I am here in response to the invitation, although it seems little less than presumption in me to make such an attempt when Mr. Frederic Ingham's formula, which he prepared for the use of his double on like occasions, would afford such a short and easy method of escape, both for my hearers and for myself. This formula, you will remember, ran in this wise: "There has been so much said, and on the whole so well said, that I will not occupy the time." Nevertheless, I am committed to the effort, and ask your attention to that aspect of the question which furnishes the key-note to my paper, viz.,

The evil of unlimited freedom in the use of juvenile fiction.

I am fully conscious that in essaying to measure lances on this subject with the veteran librarians of this Association, I am in imminent danger of being worsted, yet my convictions are so strong that they force me to enter the lists; while corroborating testimony from those teachers and parents who have given the matter serious thought, gives me courage to do battle for the standard even should the bearer fall. And lest my colors should be mistaken, I

wish to announce at the outset that I am not an implacable foe to all juvenile literature, although, to my mind, much of the so-called article might be eliminated without disaster to the rising generation!

My protest is entered against the freedom which most of our public libraries afford for the *daily* supply and exchange of this class of books among school children, feeling convinced that such latitude conflicts with the highest interests of our schools, and that a judicious restriction upon the quantity as well as quality of books loaned to pupils would have a beneficial effect upon scholarship, and win the thanks of more than one thoughtful and conscientious teacher whose efforts are now put to disadvantage, and often paralyzed, through the baneful influence of those desultory and careless mental habits engendered in pupils by this same inordinate consumption of story-books.

The evil of this unlimited supply is coming to be understood by many of our best teachers, and not a few of them, with full appreciation of the dangers of its continuance, have appealed to library authorities to know if something could not be done to check its further progress. One teacher said to me, within a year, that her greatest bane in school was library books, she having to maintain constant warfare against them, and that in her exasperation she had frequently wished there was not a public library within fifty miles of her school-room! Think of the condition of things which could force such words from an exceptionally faithful and successful teacher—herself a lover of books.

If we investigate the cause of her trouble we find that she has to contend, not only with surreptitious reading in school hours, which is the least of these evils, but also with inattention, want of application, distaste for study, and unretentive memories, all directly traceable to the influence of that ill-directed and inordinate use of light literature which is fostered by the present library system of which it is our wont to boast.

What other result can be expected when three-fourths of our pupils average a library book per day, which they claim to read through? What wonder that we have yet to learn of the boy or girl who can devour half a dozen books per week and yet maintain rank number one on the school record? Why be surprised that these same boys and girls stand in helpless confusion when a request to tell something about the last-read book betrays the fact that they remember little or nothing about it? They read to-day and forget to-morrow—and they study in much the same way. Is it not easy to see that this mental process, repeated day by day, is not going to produce a generation of thinkers or workers but rather of thoughtless drones?

Having shown the mischievous influences of unlimited freedom as bearing upon the school and the pupil, it may be well to note at least one of the effects of its recoil upon the library itself, and from personal observation, I am prepared to affirm my belief that much of the lawless abuse of books is the direct outgrowth of that indifference to the value of library privileges which perfect freedom is apt to produce in all classes of readers, old as well as young. Certain it is that from the ranks of inveterate readers of fiction come those who leave their marks upon every book they borrow, as I can testify from the bitter experience of eight long weeks devoted to the task of removing such defacements from the books under my charge.

Many parents have already taken alarm at this craze for books, which leads to utter neglect of home as well as school duties, and seizing the reins in their own hands have positively prohibited their children the use of library books—an extreme measure, it is true, but preferable to unlimited freedom.

Librarians have done what they could to stem the tide of indiscriminate reading, by seeking every opportunity for direct personal influence upon the choice of books, as well as by furnishing separate catalogues for school children, but, however successful either attempt may be, it meets but half the question. It saves from Scylla, but Charybdis still threatens, in the fact of *daily* supply and exchange.

While discussing this question, it may seem that I have lost sight of the benefits of free libraries; let me say that no one has a higher appreciation than myself of the present good and future possibilities of such liberal institutions. I have only left the merits of that side of the question to other and abler hands.

Remembering that the danger to our pupils lies in the excess of supply as well as in its character, we need to apply a remedy which may be formulated thus: *lessen the quantity and improve the quality.* When we shall have done this we may look for happier results at home, at school, and in the library. Our task will be no easy one, but the duty seems plain. Will not the skeptical in our ranks fall into line and by united effort so direct and influence public opinion that it will cheerfully sustain any measure which looks to this end?

READING IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

BY ROBERT C. METCALF, MASTER OF WELLS SCHOOL, BOSTON.

OF course no one here will misunderstand the drift of the question. A few years ago, and it would have called up in the mind only a drill upon the pronunciation of words, upon inflection, upon expression, or generally upon what may be called *elocution.*

A few years ago it would be, "John, what mark follows the third word in the fourth line?" "A period." "And how long do you stop at a period?" "Long enough to count four." "What inflection of the voice is required at a period?" "The falling." And it was only after years of teaching, or at least of observation, that we learned that the mark of punctuation had little to do with the resting or with the inflection of the voice.

It was only after many years that we found the teaching of reading in the schools to be a process by which we furnished boys and girls with a key to the vast treasures of knowledge contained in what we call the Literature of the Language,—a literature with us now so widely diffused by means of the public press and the public library.

How then shall we so connect the public school with the public press and the public library that the pupil can, to the best advantage, secure the benefits of each?

Our scholars will read; there is no doubt at all about that. It only remains for us to direct their reading so as to reach and secure what is good, and avoid all that is bad. The teachers should require all pupils above the age of ten years to own a note-book in which shall be recorded, from time to time, the names of all books that might be read with profit in connection with the subjects taught in the schoolroom. A lesson in Geography might suggest the "Swiss Family Robinson," or "Robinson Crusoe"; a lesson in History, "The Days of Bruce," or some of Scott's novels; a lesson in reading perhaps suggests "Stellar worlds," or some interesting biography. Thus in a few years the