THE READING HABIT AND A WIDE CURRICULUM.

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Read by Mr. Arthur Burrell.

The curriculum of the child is the provision for the man.

"Do as you like," is the new commandment for children,—so we are told; but there are two things against this rule of life. In the first place, it is not possible, and in the next, it is not pleasant; a day or a household with no fixed rule has many weary hours. The heads of schools know very well that law, order, routine, are comforting and reposeful, that the troublesome child subsides when he goes to school or begins school at home, because he has got into a new atmosphere where it is not necessary for him to force his inclinations in order that he may follow them. We all know the weariness of a day in a new place where we have no necessary occupations; and it is the same with children; certain things to be done at certain times is a rule that saves them from being bored. Now, children are not bored at school, but the excitements
[p 562]
and interests of school life are not of a sort that they can carry away. Marks, prizes, places, games, the delight of being carried along by a pleasing personality, are well enough in their way for the grown-up as well as for the child, but the keen and constant pursuit of any of them is a poor way of life.

Children should begin at school what it is well they should go on with of their own desire, and Nature gives them the proper provision. Everyone has an instinctive love of knowledge; the Russian moujik, shows great eagerness in questioning a traveller about the places he knows, for we all have a geography-hunger. Again, at every railway station in Russia, a translation of *Paradise Lost* is to be bought for a few kopeks, and it is the work most widely read by the peasants. Tolstoi recognized this innate and general appetite for literature and wrote tales for the people which were sold by the million. Indeed, we all know *knowledge* when we get it, just as we know food, and we take to it as kindly.

We do not take into account in our theory and practice of education the insatiable hunger of intellect. The appetites know satiety; the intellectual desires, for place, power, praise, pence and knowledge know none; and that is why our school discipline in these days runs upon the love of place, power, praise and wealth (marks, scholarships, etc.), but the desire of knowledge, the master impulse of the mind, is rather left out of account. It is easy to govern a school by a judicious play upon these other natural desires, but when we come to deal with knowledge, much thought and discrimination are necessary, and, above all, that for which I hold a brief—a wide curriculum. If any hearer believes that I am called like Balaam to "curse" a wide curriculum, echoing the cry of the day, let him be prepared to hear me bless it altogether. There is nothing more lamentable than the outcry made when unfortunate teachers have to contend with another new subject added to a curriculum which they find already over-full; (yes, there is one thing worse—the unworthy and fatuous outcry against books as instruments of education. As a matter of fact there is no education without books, many books, the best books.) A wide curriculum is like a plunge into a pool; courage for the plunge, and the experience is ecstatic; and to get this courage we must labour at a few
[p 563]
preliminary considerations which are outside the current of common thought on which our

minds are carried easily.

In the first place, let us believe that children have no intellectual limitation save that of ignorance, that they are more able than we to understand (a child of three enjoys and quotes from the *Just So Stories*), and have the freshest hunger for knowledge. Again, children have no "faculties" to be developed. The mind is like Wordsworth's cloud; it moves altogether when it moves at all; it performs all its own functions of reasoning, comparing, imagining and the rest, and our attempts at assisting are like efforts to facilitate physical digestion; the child flags under predigested food because there is no profit without labour, and Nature chooses to work in her own way.

Then, children *require* knowledge just as they require food. As the under-fed child is of stunted growth, so intellectual under-feeding accounts for the low moral and intellectual stature of many persons who have gone through the ordinary grind. But why "moral?" The philosopher whom time cannot age reveals this to us also; in the Platonic axiom, *Virtue is Knowledge*, we get the secret; we learn why seemingly educated persons do shameful things; and we realize something of the solemn and sacramental character of education, which is the outward and visible sign of that inward and spiritual grace,—the life and growth of the human spirit.

Let me offer two or three more preliminary considerations. The old dream of encyclopædic knowledge is no more a delusion than was the notion of a western continent before Columbus sailed; we are not permitted to be ignorant of literature, science or art, of past history or present conditions. "But children," we say, "can't learn everything; what we really aim at is to teach them *how* to learn." The general complaint is, however, that we fail to teach this art, and that most persons are not interested in learning after they leave school. On the other hand, men like Goethe, for instance, who are students all their lives, go on from where they were as children and do not start new studies. So we have a double aim before us, to initiate all those interests which it is good to have in after life, and to begin that habit of study, or rather of thoughtful and informed appreciation in many directions, which makes so much of the joy of living.

[p 564]

Jane Austen speaks somewhere about a heroine's imagination being "warmed." Now, that is just what happens. The child who learns about Daniel, Demosthenes, Darius, in a way that appeals to him has a warm place in his imagination for each of these personages; they are familiar to him as are the names of the cities we know and love when we see them on a map. What is more, the mind "'eaves 'arf a brick" at any quite new line of knowledge, whereas additions to familiar knowledge are delightful, for it is our nature to go on with that which has been duly begun. But we ignore all this and divide life into compartments,—a time to learn—our schooldays; a time to work—when we are grown-up; a time to play—whenever play is possible. Let us try how another division works out. Happiness is our chief pursuit, the active consciousness of happiness, which we call joy; now, intellectual joy is the chief joy of early life, emotional joy, of adolescence, and intellectual joy, again, of mature life. How short-sighted then are we if we fail to acquire while young the happy-making habit which is to last us through life! I suppose we all lament the poverty of our intellectual resources. We hate to be alone because our random thoughts do not entertain, and do, too often, worry us; we wish we had the power of originating an idea and thinking it out, but, as Mr. Chesterton has told us, a new

thought is a most rare occurrence (he cites Mrs. Todgers' "idea of a wooden leg"—an idea we shall never know!), and our own thoughts are at the best detestably stale. We do not recognize that we are provided for in this dearth, for it is the nature of an idea which strikes us to breed ideas and we think only as we are touched by a thought. Once alive to our daily need of intellectual diet, we know where to look for it. The best thought and the best knowledge of the best minds is writ in books, and we are aware of invigoration and joy in reading a sustaining book. It is no use to ask,—Is it remunerative? Are we the better for it morally or materially? These things do not matter. The intellect has its own *criteria*. There are certain ways of ordering words which make for delight, we do not know why, but the mind is as fastidious as the palate, and will reject knowledge itself that is not delicately dressed and fitly served. I seem to have wandered far to come at "a wide curriculum," but the curriculum of the child is the
[p 565]
provision for the man, and, if we have few mental resources, the reason why is that we were kept on short rations as children.

There are two other conditions to be insisted upon besides those of quantity and quality, (insisted upon, because the mind insists). "Order is heaven's first law" is especially true of the mind; and that is why the casual reading in which most of us indulge does not afford sufficient mental sustenance. I suppose we ought all to read on a plan, all round such a period, or such a territory, or such a philosophic problem, and that we should, if we can find a listener, tell pretty definitely what we have read, or write summaries. But nobody wants to hear us "tell," and we are too lazy to write; so what we fail to do for ourselves let us anyway see that our children shall accomplish. For this reason the notion of turning a child loose in a library by way of education is not satisfactory, because desultory reading has not the sustaining quality we look for, though it affords stimulus. In like manner the laudable efforts, made in many elementary schools, to supply children with good home reading fail as education though they succeed in adding pleasure to life.

The school syllabus-of-reading for a term, covered in the hours of morning-school, accompanied by ready sympathy, though with but little instruction from the teacher, seems to meet the case very well indeed. Children reading for themselves take the trouble to understand and know; but I think it is safe to say that every effort made by the teacher to help in this process lessens the power of attention in the pupil. We find it a good plan in the *Parents' Union School* to make history the central subject, and to let other subjects, such as literature, geography or travel, reading in modern languages, radiate from the history studied, an arrangement which appeals to common-sense, and most teachers follow some such rule.

Now for the crucial question,—that of a wide curriculum. There is no doubt that teachers are, from their point of view, justified in their protest against the inclusion of many subjects of study. Let us consider the laborious process of getting, say, a single historical incident, with the events that led to it and that ensued "into" a class. The master, we will say, gives a lesson or lecture, with blackboard notes, readings from various authorities, and any pictures or other illustrations
[p 566]
that occur. Then follows a *questionnaire* in which the bright boys shine, but the majority continue to do nothing. Full notes have been dictated and taken down by the boys during the lecture, which they report *in extenso*, and the master at his leisure (!) corrects. Three "periods"

of school-time have been encroached upon, but little knowledge is gained, and that, imperfectly known by the best boys and oddly muddled by the rest. The attention of the boys has been divided between their private subjects of speculation, the effort of taking notes and the matter in hand; so very little is done, even with an inspiring teacher.

Let us substitute self-education for this manner of conscientious teaching. Every boy has his book, a well-written, considerable manual; a single good book should, I think, be left to tell its own tale. The boys read a section or a chapter either aloud or silently, little or no explanation is offered; a boy can understand what he is able to read, and the book explains itself. In half-an-hour the class will have read a number of pages; then a few of the less attentive boys are required to narrate what falls under such and such a heading (on the blackboard); or, the boys are tested by being required to write a short paragraph on some point in the lesson. Their spelling and composition will probably be good because these are learned by reading, and not in any other way. Their intelligent mastery of the subject is pleasing; even the dull boys know; the class is at attention all the time, understanding that only a single reading will be allowed. What is read with attention is not forgotten, and no getting up of notes is necessary later when a general examination is due. The amount of time saved is so great that a large number of good books are in reading each term, while no more time is afforded for history and literature, say, than is given in any good school.

Give the scholar books that are worth reading, let him do the work for himself, and his attention does not flag; he is able to take in any fairly lucid passage at a single reading, and his mind works after its manner upon that which it has apprehended.

Having economised the school hours to a surprising extent, the rest is easy. We have but to consider what manner of knowledge a boy will want for his own uses as a person who
[p 567]
inherits historical traditions and literary associations, as an inmate of a world governed by natural laws and full of delightful phenomena, as a person permitted to use material of many sorts. We all know the half-resentful disgust with which we regard the starry heavens (about which we are shamefully ignorant), the Italian pictures about which a companion raves, the birds which affront us by song and habit because we know little about them, the ions about which scientific friends wax eloquent, the differences in structure between aeroplane and hydroplane, and so on, over the whole wide field of our unlettered ignorance, including special resentment against persons who make historical or literary allusions which stir no chord. This simmering resentment is not so unreasonable as it looks. We come into the world with enormous curiosity ready to develop into a love of knowledge; with, also, a desire for variety, change, which is not sufficiently utilized in school-work. Give short lesson “periods,” include many subjects during the week, and children will do double the work in double the number of subjects with less labour and better results than they would do half the work in half the number of subjects under the usual conditions. Now, this is true only if they read for themselves their own books; but many teachers are like a chauffeur who would not only “feed” his engine but get down to turn the wheels of his car! We insist on turning the wheels of a child’s mind, whereas our sole duties are to supply and direct it, and, because a child is not an engine, to give impulse and sympathy. An energetic teacher complains that if he is not to teach all the time there is nothing left for him to do; he is zealous, like that curate to whom his vicar gently hinted that it would be well from time to time to read a sermon by one of our great divines, instead of

preaching his own. "Sir," said he, "do you think I would offer my Maker that which cost me nothing?" "Very true, very true, my dear fellow, but should we not offer that which is worth something?"

Conscientious teachers love to spend themselves, to give that which costs them something, but is what they give of value? Or is it not true that either teacher or scholar works during a lesson, but not both? The teacher's more delicate and less obvious work is profitable to his pupils; not so, that really fine lesson on which he has spent himself; for in this
[p 568]
regard, if teachers will but believe it, the returns are in the ratio of the expenditure, not of energy on the teacher's part but of attention on that of the pupil.

This is the *rationale* of the popular cry for self-education. It has been observed that children are attentive, delightfully absorbed, when engaged in manual work, and several fallacious deductions are drawn,—as, that motor power develops earlier than does intellectual, that the intelligence of children is "cultivated" through their fingers; in a word, that ancient "lie of the soul," that, "knowledge is sensation," has revived amongst us with dangerous virility. No doubt motor activity has its extremely important place, and the physical energies, whether sensory or muscular, must have due exercise (nature sees to their nutrition). As Professor Geddes has well pointed out, the schoolboy must be furnished with ball and apple; he must throw the ball and eat the apple (of knowledge). Now, the ball, he is encouraged to throw for himself, but the apple,—we eat it for him! Small wonder that he loathes the masticated mass, whether in the moist state of an oral lesson or dried and served up in a text-book.

There is a moral to be drawn from a child's love of doing, but it is not that he is to be educated through his motor or his sensory activities. A little consideration will show us that his intellectual advances during the first two or three years of life greatly out-distance these. Why, he learns a language, sometimes two or even three; uses words with marvellous fitness, sometimes literary fitness. He has learned the more obvious properties of matter; he knows far and near, hot and cold, hard and soft, how to conduct himself with judgment in the matters of stairs, chairs and tables, knives and forks, and, as for his advance in the art of loving, is any love like that of a little child for his mother, for his Nana, his Teddy-bear?—for his active imagination is royal in its bestowal of life and sensibility.

The little person goes about all day in quest of knowledge and his remarks surprise his elders; many a written tale delights him; but when he goes to school, he is not allowed to forage in those fields which we call books. But, he cannot read, you say. No, nor is there any hurry that he should acquire the mechanical arts of reading and writing. Tell him tales, let him learn flowers and birds and things
[p 569]
till he is six; then, he should go to school, whether at home or elsewhere, and the learning to read and write and sum are by far the least important parts of his education. He begins to be at home in the worlds of letters, history, travel, not through watered-down reproductions brought to "his level," but through poems, tales, histories,—the best that we have. His serious self-education has begun, because he narrates what is read to him. He listens with fixed attention and is able to tell the whole; that is, he acquires the reading habit during the two or three years spent in learning the crafts of reading and writing; and, in so far as he possesses this habit, he is better educated than many a boy and girl who on leaving school are unable to fix their

attention in such wise as to know a page or passage at the first reading. By and by, when he can read, the habit of attention continues with him; he knows quite well what he is reading and is bored by much talk about it. What he wants to know is that his teacher cares, too; for him, he feels a ballad or an ode, (not a sonnet, though, for that usually touches a chord of experience), plays his part in the history of his race, journeys with the traveller, sees the things he reads of. He will draw you a picture of Brutus "in the orchard," of young "Graeme" dropping the keys into Loch Leven, of Captain Scott at the South Pole, of Perseus delivering Andromeda, with details of his own invention showing that he sees what he describes with his brush. Later, a wide field opens to him, or, more often, to her.

I venture to obtrude a perhaps unique experience in the hope of inducing teachers to allow their pupils the intellectual liberty of getting knowledge for themselves out of their own books, on the sole condition that they *know* what they have read; that they will allow them, too, regulated latitude in their studies, that is, a wide curriculum, recognizing that we are so made that our minds can deal more effectively with a large number of subjects than with a few. *Punch* told us the other day how Leonardo would cut a canal, paint a picture or work at a flying machine with equal ardour and success, (though he did not effect a working aeroplane!). What we forget is that he was representative of his age; later, our own Christopher Wren was, we know, a man of many attainments, of which a knowledge of architecture was among the least, and

see what he has left us! It may be that the specialist is defunct, for we are beginning to realize that he who knows one thing only cannot know that one; the world and knowledge do not exist in sealed compartments.

We should perhaps profit in our own private reading if we recognized that the mind is adapted to very various knowledge. Some persons take to more of one sort, others to more of another, but some knowledge of all sorts is welcome to everybody; and yet there are persons who from a mistaken sense of virtue will read half-a-dozen sermons on end, or whole books of poetry, or a dozen scientific papers, not recognizing that the mind wearies of sameness, and, that after repletion follows repulsion. We adhere rigidly to a time-table for our meals and give much thought to variety; perhaps we should have a not too strict time-table for our intellectual diet, (not to the exclusion of casual delights), and should lay ourselves out for "fine, various" reading, even while we are working round a single subject. Anyway, let us secure for children the heritage of intellectual joy, recognizing that it is the function of childhood to enter upon whatever domain of knowledge the man shall possess.

I am very anxious to secure the co-operation of teachers in our effort for the intellectual emancipation of children, who respond to such effort, I had almost said, tumultuously. Every day letters arrive,—"the interest of So-and-so never flags." "So-and-so delights in all her books"; and the principal and examiner of this big and widely scattered school, a not too lenient critic, says that the unsatisfactory papers are about at the rate of 1%. As for the more purely disciplinary subjects, mathematics, grammar, experimental science, we do not neglect these, for, following the analogy of the body, we recognize that the mind requires gymnastics as well as functional exercise; nor do we lose sight of the sound learning these subjects afford. Here is a field in which most teachers excel, and if they would add knowledge, much and various knowledge, to their ideal of scholastic virtue, we should have what the world has not yet seen,

fully educated children. No doubt such children have occurred here and there where parents have perceived the undulating line that exists between directing, and following the lead of, their children. There is joy in the home, the incomparable joy of intellectual life,
[p 571]
when the child strikes sparks of thought from his parent, the parent drops seeds of reflection in the eager mind of the child; but this kind of happy intercourse can only take place where there is the mutual joy of books. The intellectual resources of the best of us are too limited to sustain a growing life, and it is only when we and the children feed on the same books that delightful intercourse is possible.

We find, as a matter of fact, that the schoolroom under the conditions I have indicated has quickened the dormant intellectual life in many a household. If the question of the cost of books be raised, the teacher who has the courage of his opinions will easily convince parents that they are a first necessary of life, that real education depends upon books, that watered milk is as sustaining as watered-down knowledge, orally delivered; that, for a child to begin his library at the age of six with books he will always care to possess, and to go on adding year by year and term by term books of delight which he knows and knows his way about, is an investment of the very first value, even money value, for that matter.

But why should I presume to be urgent with teachers? Is it not they who have sent up a memorial in the spirit of Lord Haldane's never-to-be-forgotten "Education to be interesting must appeal to the spirit," urging the compelling power of lofty ideals and arguing that education, treated as an affair of the spirit, would unite all the spiritual forces of the nation? What a spiritual Niagara for the work of the world!

Nevertheless, I fear that the noble instinct of self-sacrifice will prevail, and teachers will attempt to do it all "off their own bat," not recognizing that the direct impersonal play of many minds upon his own is necessary to the full and free development of that cosmos which we call an individual. Solon himself could bring up no free man but only a parasite upon his words of wisdom. Among the results of an educational fallacy of the day is the undue exaltation of the personality of the teacher; it is for him to retire, to put other greater minds to the front, minds which will not stultify their disciple, because personal glamour is less present in books, and also, because many books by many men give each its share of impulse and knowledge to the maturing mind. We are told every day that England is degenerating, that we are
[p 572]
becoming a commonplace people with vulgar aims; and it is amusing that one should stand and cry aloud,—Books, more Books, Books in school and Books on many subjects,—as the sole efficient bulwark against an invasion of materialism. Abana and Pharpar are better rivers than Jordan, but the Jordan I propose is an infallible cure for the dead and leprous spirit of man, because nothing speaks to us more directly from the Spirit of God than the best books of the best men; and, does not "Books" include, and put in its proper place, close converse with, familiar knowledge of, THE BOOK *par excellence*, through whose pages we believe that we are taught of God?