

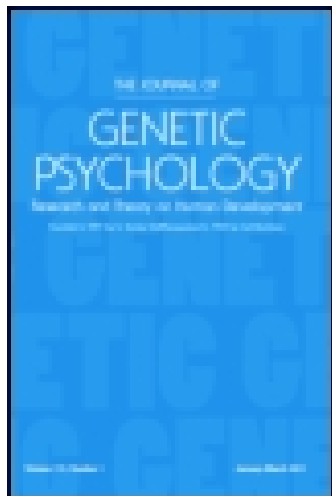
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Publisher: Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954

Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



The Pedagogical Seminary

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/vzps20>

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G. Stanley Hall

Published online: 30 Aug 2012.

To cite this article: G. Stanley Hall (1908) Psychology of Childhood as Related to Reading and the Public Library, The Pedagogical Seminary, 15:1, 105-116, DOI: [10.1080/08919402.1908.10534118](https://doi.org/10.1080/08919402.1908.10534118)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08919402.1908.10534118>

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PSYCHOLOGY OF CHILDHOOD AS RELATED TO READING AND THE PUBLIC LIBRARY.¹

By G. STANLEY HALL.

One of the most significant culture movements of the last few years in this country is the invasion of the library upon the school. In the *grades* the library now goes to the school and the school to the library. Librarians make the children's reading room attractive and tell stories even on fine days when some children ought to be out of doors, and offer most seductive lists of supplementary reading for every grade and topic. The library often takes sole charge here and should take charge of those beyond school age. The *high* school expects the pupils to find help in the library for debates and composition, if not for daily lessons, and librarians teach them how to get at what they want. In the *college* and the university the library is becoming more and more the heart of everything and the professor a grand chamberlain to introduce books, give their credentials and inspire students to read them. The library is the centre of the seminary and a necessity even in the laboratory. More and more of our college dons' teaching is where to find what literature may be wanted. Now, for young people, nearly half of whose body by weight is muscle, to sit in closed spaces in the usual reading postures and exercise only the muscles of the eye that weigh two ounces, monotonously zigzagging across the printed page, while nearly a quarter of fourteen-year-olds develop eye defects, presents a serious problem in racial hygiene. If the child actually becomes bookish something is usually the matter with it, but despite the dangers, the advance of the library upon the school is on the whole a vast benefit for the latter, which I would represent to-night, and I could easily consume my hour in describing actual and hoped for good results.

One danger, though, that now looms big is that of mediocrity, of the second or tenth best in literature, for the great problem of selection from the so rapidly growing mass of juvenile books written for children is by no means solved, not even in Germany, by Ziegler's Jugendschriftenwarte with its 78 com-

¹ Address at meeting of the New York Library Club, New York City, Jan. 9, 1908.

mittees in 28 German states, or by Wolgast's two books and Prüfenausschüsse that gets often a dozen expert verdicts for each book and accepts or condemns to oblivion, a muster that it is hard for a poor book to pass, and upon which the sentences pronounced are crushing. The sad fact remains that children can develop a veritable *cacoethes legendi* or a passion for reading *per se* things on or below their own level, mere ferment, artificiality and vanity, that they ought to learn in the more vital ways of experience and conversation. Printing gives no added value to commonplaces and the reading habit should not dignify platitudes. Apprehension through the printed page is slower and involves more nervous strain than perception, and the book is liable to get between the child and nature and life. Child life in the field, on the street or at home is rich and must not be encroached on. Not only may the new knack of reading or seeing familiar things through the medium of print by authors who strive to get down to the children and tickle them by quaint affectations of style and sickly sentiments become a distinctly neurotic habit, but it may make things near seem afar and unreal and bring mental anæmia. The charm to a country child of reading in the first grade literature of the cow, pig, dog, cat, which he knows so well at first hand, is almost meretricious, and the same is true for the city child and also up the grades. Nor is it well to spend much time in reading about what every child is certain to learn anyway at first hand a little later. Thus the precept to read only what adds something essential, that could not be got otherwise and outside the stern and narrow time and place limitations of the child's individual life, would reduce many of the lists, and neither in the school nor the home can or should the book compete with the oral story. So, too, illustrations should be many of them colored. Most of them full of action with broad and simple treatment, perhaps drawable; not too often making really pitiable misfortunes humorous or jocose, and thus blunting pity or suggesting mischief, like "Peck's Bad Boy," but with plenty of animals and children, though not of the Greenaway short-waisted, doll-faced type that never grow up, and which charm adults, but cannot compete for the suffrages of children with the rough daubs of Struwwelpeter.

When the child can read and its soul can take flight through the vast psychic spaces represented by books, there are also *new* possibilities of degradation, moral, physical and mental, and just as, since charity is now a science as well as a virtue, we must not give doles to beggars indiscriminately lest they pauperize and besot, so we have no right now even to teach reading without taking every possible precaution that the vast-

ness of new opportunity cause no decadence or bring muddle, for nothing is more dangerous than great ideas injected into small minds, or lurid tragedies made the habitual diet of excitable souls, as in yellow journalism. Possibly the world's best is too *great* and just barely possible its undiluted best is too *good* for some children. Books true to life and that interest are sure to have some bad characters and acts in them, but perhaps the pale bookish way is the best in which to make children acquainted with the inevitable evil they must know. Even the Sunday school library, the function of which is now happily growing, must and does not now exclude all but goody books.

Differences in reading tastes between boys and girls, which are very slight in early childhood, not always sufficiently known or taken account of, appear several years before puberty and thereafter increase rapidly. These differences are so spontaneous and universal, so well established by many statistical studies by various methods upon so many thousand children (the chief references to which I here append) that they should be duly recognized by librarians, teachers and parents. These are among the most interesting and important revelations of how very diversely nature has decreed that the soul of the two sexes should develop. Chief among these taste differences are the following: Girls usually read most books. If they do not acquire the habit earliest, they certainly maintain it after that of boys' has begun to decline and some censuses indicate that they read most at all ages. Even at those ages when they certainly read most, viz., the later teens, they read fewer different books, that is, a larger number read the same. Girls rely more upon the recommendations of teachers, older companions, and others, while boys show greater independence and individuality of choice, and hence use on the average a wider range of books. Girls read what others read, while the books others know have less charm and sometimes almost repel boys who prefer to be ignorant of what all others about them know, and to interest themselves in what none or few others have read. Again, secret and clandestine reading of literature that is condemned, forbidden or disapproved is more common among boys, for prohibition attracts them and arouses their curiosity. They more often fall victims to the literature that it is a crime to print, circulate or own. The vast amount of this literature now confiscated and destroyed by the purity societies shows at once the extent of the danger and gives hope that protective agencies against it are becoming more effective. In the teens, boys often look somewhat askance at reading recommended to them by lady teachers who often quite fail to understand how widely their tastes differ from those of girls. With the present

feminization of teaching, therefore, boys are more uncontrolled in their reading. This, I think, we may connect with the oft-noted fact that men, young and old, often condemn much which they used to read when young, while women are more prone to advise others to read that they did when girls, their mature judgment more often coinciding with their childish tastes. Both sexes love literature about animals but in a different way; girls preferring accounts of pets and domestic animals, while boys care most for the literature of wild, savage beasts, and for hunting. Girls love cats, which ripening boys often abhor, strongly preferring dogs, often sharing the enmity of the *Canidæ* for the *Felidæ*. This may be atavism, for men were huntsmen of old, while primitive women domesticated nearly all the animals that serve man.

Again, boys read most history, science and travels; girls most novels and poetry. The historic interest of the latter is more often personal and biographic. Boys love adventure, girls sentiment. Women writers appeal far more strongly to girls in the teens than to boys, for whom at this age few women can write attractively. In childhood, both sexes are interested in fairy tales but girls most, and while boys practically cease to care for them by the fourth or fifth grade, girls' zest continues through the sixth, seventh and later. Girls care far more for niceness, whether of style, binding, illustration; treat books better and are more amenable to library rules. As between content and form, girls care relatively more for the latter, boys for the former. Girls love to read stories about girls which boys eschew, girls, however, caring much more to read about boys than boys to read about girls. Books dealing with domestic life and with young children in them, girls have almost entirely to themselves. Boys, on the other hand, excel in love of humor, rollicking fun, abandon, rough horse play and tales of wild escapades. Girls are less averse to reading what boys like than boys are to reading what girls like. A book popular with boys would attract some girls, while one read by most girls would repel a boy in the early and middle teens. The reading interests of high school girls are far more humanistic, cultural and general and that of boys is more practical, vocational and even special. Girls' interest in love stories and romance is earlier, far greater and continues longer than with boys and the same is true, although to a somewhat less extent, for society tales.

Reading crazes seem to be experienced in some degree at some time by the majority of school children. Some read for years with abandon and intoxication, rushing through an amount of literature that would seem incredible were not the evidence so abundant, while with others the passion is milder

and briefer. It usually occurs just before or perhaps in the early teens when it seems as if the soul suddenly took flight, awakening with a start to the possibilities of transcending the narrow limitations of individual life and expanding the personality toward the dimensions of the race itself as if trying to become a citizen of all times and a spectator of all events. This is one of the most interesting phenomena of youth standing tip-toe on the mount of expectation as the vista of life first bursts upon his view. Those who experience this in full measure are never the same thereafter. It seems to occur somewhat earlier in girls than in boys, and to more often cause a bifurcation of the inner life of idealization and fancy with the outer life of dull and often monotonous daily routine, especially of a girl's life in school or home. In reverie, she dreams of wealth, splendor, heroic wooers who take her away to a life where all desires are fulfilled, where the possible becomes actual and castles in the air materialize. This also often makes the future seem so rich and full that some disillusion is inevitable later. Boys in the book craze also sometimes read away from life, but feeling that their destiny is to be of their own making are more liable to be spurred to action, occasionally, to be sure, to run away, to fight Indians or become bandits or beat their way to a city and to fortune, but usually to strive to achieve more legitimate ambitions, to win fame, fortune, beauteous maidens and to do great deeds. Ruskin and others since have deprecated the danger of such passionate devotion to the reading of the best things life has to offer him lest ordinary life pale by comparison and become humdrum and insipid and home and parents seem stupid and commonplace; but is it not on the whole well to feel strong and early the spurs of that discontent which is the first step to the betterment of both self and environment?

There is still a far too wide difference between the reactions of children to spontaneous reading and to that prescribed for them by adults. From eight or ten on into, if not through, the teens, every statistical study yet made shows a rapid rise in the amount of reading chosen by the children themselves, while both Barnes and the Hartford Report show a striking decline in the stated reading which the school demands. Though it be done, it is with steadily declining interest. The ponderous list of the Wisconsin State Superintendent in 1902, of 1,588 books for high school libraries selected chiefly by principals and college professors, a list outside which it is illegal to purchase either books or editions with library funds, seems to me a good modern instance of an organized attempt to control pupils' reading by adults without sufficiently consulting their tastes. The same is true now to a greater and now to a less

extent, of half a shelf of books, pamphlets and articles I have collected (the 100 or 500 best books, standard child libraries, courses of reading, sometimes approved by formidable lists of literary and other great men and women, etc.). Some of these lists omit many of the good books that children would have voted in, had they been consulted, while others contain most of them, but with nothing to designate their popularity with juvenile readers or to distinguish them from adult prescriptions. It is already possible, however, to make a good beginning of a juvenile library of books children of each age prefer and one of the chief needs of the day in this field is more statistical data of what they love best and a canon of child classics or Bible compiled from their suffrages or of what they most often recommend to each other. Those are greatly in error who think we have solved the problem of children's reading. We have, in fact, just begun to see its dimensions. We can, however, already (1) perceive some great crying needs of books of a kind which do not exist, (2) discern the outlines of a method of selection not yet applied, and (3) some principles of elimination by which an index expurgatorius could be begun. Let us consider these.

I. We need a series of animal and bird books of which as yet I have never seen a single proper specimen; for instance, a monkey book, a book devoted to the wolf, one each to the fox, bear, lion, tiger, elephant, dog, eagle, ants, bees, wasps, and two or three dozen other forms of animal life. In other words, there should be a child's animal library, and here some publishers or authors are certain to make fame and fortune as unexpected as that which came from the Teddy bear, from Uncle Remus 'Brer Rabbit,' from Black Beauty, or in the Middle Ages centered about the living totem of the lower classes, Reynard the fox, of which a thousand editions are extant. The veins of interest here are comparable to those producing natural gas, oil, coal and other great resources when their richness was first perceived and great results are certain, provided only the exploitation be right. Certain principles can be laid down with confidence as follows: Each of these books must be very copiously illustrated, often in colors, and all the recent nature books, not faked, must be cross-sectioned and laid under tribute. Let me describe one or two of these ideal but as yet non-existent animal books for the young, beginning for instance with the monkey book. It should first describe from all available resources the life habits of typical species, how they live in troops, their leaders, their battles with each other and with the enemies to which they are most exposed, how some of them break up into family groups at the pairing season, how they carry and care for their young, the daily routine of the male

and the female, the dangers to which they are exposed, their food habits, how they sleep, their migrations, their organized forays, their diseases, parasites, reactions to extreme heat and cold, their language—all these compiled from trustworthy sources now so accessible, copious and well known, but widely scattered. While true to fact, the style should be lively and the anthropomorphism frankly seen, to awaken and sustain humanistic sympathy. Another chapter should be devoted to the monkeys in captivity, their domestication, characteristics of species and in these their training, its methods and results, with biographical sketches of famous apes, particularly the four great species now living, chimpanzee, gibbon, orang and gorilla, with plenty of authentic anecdotes, etc. Another section should tell of monkey myths from the ancient Hindu war against Ballin, king of all the monkeys, to the way in which primitive races that know them best regard them, with fables of their imitativeness and others traits from Æsop down. Then, too, there should be a brief and popular story of the surprising results of recent experiments upon ape intelligence and educability. In another section for older readers there should be a few skeletal comparative plates showing species and the relation of their frame to that of man—perhaps all on a single page with another page of comparative embryological development, and one or two more to illustrate comparative anatomy of other organs and one or more outline maps should show the habitat of different species which should be represented by cuts as numerous as in Brehm. In a page or two there should be a brief statement about the fossil monkeys, particularly the great ones ending with the Java *pithecanthropus*, the missing link, and a paragraph should state some of the Simian traits in men and in babies. What is wanted is a general survey of all that is known with stress not upon morphology, but upon behavior,—all condensed, simplified, humanized, richly dight with moral and copiously studded with incident and story in a way to awaken sympathy and give knowledge of the forms of animal life nearest to man—possibly his cousin, having a common but yet undiscovered ancestry.

So a comprehensive dog book constructed on somewhat analogous principles with a little about pedigree, domestication, and many cuts of breeds, a great deal about disposition, the manifest services which dogs have and still render to man, etc., is another need—their courage, devotion, stories, poems as numerous perhaps when brought together as those on trees collected by the writers of Arbor Day monographs. With this might go the very educative experience for a boy of owning and caring for a dog. Nearly every trait of human character is seen intensified and simplified in the instincts of the canine

species, so that a good knowledge of dog psychology and ethics is one of the best pedagogic introductions to the study of human nature, and the same would be true with variations and diverse degrees of the other books.

Such a library would awaken a deep and often dormant interest in the parents themselves and bring them into closer rapport with childhood. Children have a right to revisit thus the ancient paradise of the race when men knew more and lived nearer to animals both hostile and friendly and often worshipped them or derived their descent from them, for they have been on the earth indefinitely longer than man. Lacking this there is in the child's soul a missing link greatly needed in education, a vacuum which may be filled by the regenerative psychic tissue of morbid fears, perhaps of imaginary creatures or by cruelty, but I can only suggest this and must pass on.

II. Another crying need of childhood for mental pabulum even in this age of juvenile books is for condensed and simplified stories of the great mythic cycles, epics and classics that arose and took form in the youth of all the great races that loom up in history. There is a rich mother-lye of culture that has vitality enough to survive for ages before and without the aid of print and which constituted about the whole of the educational material of older days. When this shoots together into such ethnic monuments as Homer, the Niebelungen, the Arthuriad and the rest, it welds tribes together into races. To this, far back though it be in time, the soul of youth is nearer than it is to the last election, for where the world is young there youth belongs and is at home. I have several score of books epitomizing this material for youth, and although they are of different degrees of merit, the best of them do not, in my opinion, quite fit youthful nature and needs. To bring them home and to bring out their full power, they must be fluidized again and their material put through a long and laborious process not all unlike that to which they were subjected in the dim ages of the scalds, bards and other transmitters and molders of tradition. This is a new and great pedagogic demand and next step inevitable, I am optimist enough to think, because needed. It will require the co-operation of many people and many years to complete it. These great classics of the world must, in a word, be re-edited jointly by teachers and other adults on the one hand working with children somewhat as follows. Let each who enlists in the work select some story, be it Orestes or Hamlet, Ajax or Philoctetes, Faust or the Wandering Jew, or any one of a hundred others, master it, feel all there is in it, and then tell it to children as effectively as possible, but always have them, after a brief interval, give it back in writing or orally in order to show just what parts

and phrases sunk deepest, were retained with the greatest fidelity and exerted the greatest influence upon the youthful soul. Upon this basis, the telling version should be revised and recast and the story told again and given back until at last, like an actor who has played the same part for years and may have changed it to something quite different from and more effective than what the author made it, he can say—this story thus told best fits children of a certain age, for instance, in this form those of six, in this those of ten, in that those of fourteen, etc. When many have done this for many of the best story radicals, we shall have begun to evolve a true child's canon of the great classics of the race. These versions should be shorter, simpler and very different in many respects from the originals and from the editions lately made by editors in their studies without the aid of children, but immensely more effective. May we not say that every child might demand as a right long withheld to feel the power of these great, supreme traditions of mankind? They are charged with moral power, mental stimulation and æsthetic inspiration. No creation of individuals can approach them in either of these respects. They are like the eternal stars, while our contemporary *ad hoc* stories are like tallow dips which may obscure the light from the planets themselves, merely because they are so near. Occasionally, the text itself of these old legendary themes cannot be improved on for the young, but there is always much that needs to be elided, much to be condensed, perhaps still more that needs recasting in form and may be made very telling, while if read as it stands in the text, it takes no hold whatever. Some great themes, like for instance, the Golden Age and Paradise, still need original mosaicking and editing, and could then, as Pfeiderer says, be made of great worth. Now enough of this editing has already been made to show both its practicability and its great educational value. One of the chief pedagogic tasks of the rising generation, then, must be to re-edit these grand mental sources which have made nations and races, which have been the nucleus about which culture and nations have evolved *pari passu*. Some of them have been reconstructed many times by master minds for adults, but children have as much need of them as of the homunculi called dolls or reduced adults or of toy engines or the many other masterpieces of mechanical simplification in the form of playthings. Why should not the story-tellers league with its 5,000 members essay this task? Nearly a score of years ago the French, when their education began to be laicized, commenced to sift over all their own literature and history in quest of the tales, incidents and proverbs illustrating honor, glory, self-sacrifice, etc., for a moral inspiration to fill the ethical vacuum left by the elimination of Scrip-

ture training in the schools. The labor involved in our task is a yet higher and harder one, but is also more needed, and that it will be achieved I am convinced with no shadow of doubt, for youth must be served.

III. A third new type of child book we need is an account of primitive and savage life. Frobenius in his "Aus den Flegeljahren der Menschheit" has shown almost like a revelation what can be done and how the right article is welcomed. He was an anthropologist and has compiled with over 400 cuts a simple story of how the lower races live, hunt, play, weave, manufacture, cook, eat, sleep, fight, their myths, religious ceremonies, family and tribal organizations, etc., laying the vast resources of ethnology under tribute to show the young how the great majority of men who have peopled this earth in the past, and a good fourth now living, actually meet the problems of life, regard sun, moon, stars, sea, trees, animals, fields, fire, lightning, the clouds, and think of the origin and end of man and all things. All this is very near to the child. Infection betimes with knowledge of these primeval forms of life and mind at the fit age when contagion is easiest is like vaccination which renders immune many forms of vice and hoodlumism later. The German language, Közle tells us, has 914 words in common use for children's faults and less than half that number for their virtues, for evil is far more varied, striking and, in a word, interesting, than uniform moral correctness. Here, then, is another line of juvenile literature needed and, therefore, sure to come.

I have only touched a few points in this vast field, but I cannot close without an earnest plea for more oral story telling ways of introducing books to children. Mankind heard and spoke for untold ages before they wrote and read. The ear and mouth way is shorter and vastly more effective than the long circuit tract of pen wagging and taking in meaning from the printed page by the eye. In the great literary eras in France conversation gave the style to books, and in the dull periods conversely books gave the style to conversation and people talked bookishly. Thrice happy the child who makes its first acquaintance with the great monuments of literature which arose when the world was young, not by reading, but under the spell of the story teller's art! Thus, till lately in the world's history, all knowledge was imparted from the grown-ups to the rising generation. Thus the great men and women and heroes of an elder day that letters depict lived on from age to age, and the tales of them slowly took shape edited by the folk's soul into the great mythopoeic masterpieces, for these are the quarries out of which the master workmen in literature obtain their material. In early plastic oral form these were

meaty and condensed and grew to have a chiefly ethical content almost in proportion to their age. Next to telling is reading to children, and for one I care not how much even this function encroaches upon school time or breaks up its routine. As to reading, and especially at adolescence, it is chiefly to satisfy the feelings which then and thereafter are three-fourths of the soul and represent the life of the race, while the intellect is chiefly an individual product and therefore more accidental. Four great definitions of education by four of its greatest prophets are that it consists of learning to fear aright, to be angry aright, to pity aright, and to love aright, and thus the instincts and sentiment are tuned to the world without. Girls, who cultivate heart must, of course, have love stories, and although they must be pure, there must be enough of evil to suggest adequately some of the degrees of vileness in the world, though always with the triumph of virtue sure in the end. Literature should perform moral choices, which having acted aright in ideal cases will be more likely to do so in real and trying emergencies. Urgent as are practical needs in our age and land, librarians seem now likely to be held more and more responsible as guardians of all those educational agencies that take the individual out of his narrowness into the larger life of the race. Hence, I believe you are only just at the beginning of your task of ministering to the young.

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