

## BOYS' LIBRARIES.



**I**T is now generally recognized that education belongs to leisure. The Greeks, who invented the word 'school,' knew it, but the fact had been forgotten until the pressure of competitive examinations forced it once more upon the notice of reluctant pedagogues. What a boy learns in a class-room may have various uses; it may help to lay the foundation of a successful business career—based as most business careers are upon the ability to confuse the laws of arithmetic at the right moment—or it may put him in the way of slaying the enemies of England, or of governing his dusky foster-brothers of the East; but this is not education, it has nothing to do with the soul, and very little with the body, and education aims at the development of these two and at nothing else. The facts are horribly complicated, because the wisdom of those who select officers for the army and navy and officials for the civil service, and of all sorts of other examining bodies, leads them to desire to choose educated boys; consequently it may happen that a boy who is nominally only cramming for an army examination is accidentally getting educated at the same time, whereas by rights he ought to be doing nothing of the sort. This, however, in the present state of

competitive examinations cannot be helped, and though it may complicate practice, it should not discredit theory. Leisure, then, being defined as that part of time which can be appropriated to education, it becomes clearly of supreme importance that leisure should be properly employed. 'Books, and work, and healthful play;' thus did Dr. Watts summarize and classify the employments of a man's 'best years.' By 'work' he may be presumed to have meant what we should call business—including preparation for examinations: 'books' and 'healthful play' are the objects of leisure, the means of education. Let us then consider Books. Books in Charles Lamb's sense, none of your *biblia abiblia*, that nobody would read unless he were obliged, though the educational publisher trick out his Caesars with thumbnail sketches of French scenery, and his Shakespeares with full-page illustrations as dramatic as Doré. School books we give our boys to read, order them to read them, and, very properly, smack them if they don't; what are the books that we should offer them to read when they want to read, when they come to us and say—not, perhaps, in so many words—'My soul is clamouring for victuals, and my imagination desires a banquet?' Mr. Auberon Herbert would probably say, 'Let 'em find out'; but besides the consequences in psychical indigestions and the litter of unsuccessful experiments that such a course would entail, it is absurd to expect a grown man, and especially a schoolmaster, to refrain from giving advice when he has actually been asked for it, and asked in circumstances which encourage in a particular degree

the eternal springing hope that it may be followed.

The schoolmaster responds with the Boys' Library. Now there are several ways of making a Boys' Library. One is to choose all the books you would like yourself and keep them in your own custody. This is good for the books. Another is to let the boys choose all the books—in which case you would probably rather not have the housing of them. This is bad for the boys. A third is to start the library with thirty bound volumes of *Punch*, with Shakespeare, Scott, Dickens, Thackeray, Robinson Crusoe, *Don Quixote*, and *Marie Corelli*, and having thus hinted at catholicity of taste, to leave the further development in the hands of the boys, supporting their efforts by a liberal grant from the fines inflicted for coming down late in the morning or leaving boots in unwarrantable places. This introduces a new problem, the problem of finance, which, however, is irrelevant at this stage, and only serves to show that institutions apparently similar may differ in many particulars. As a matter of fact the financial problem is not serious; books are cheap, and you do not want to rival the British Museum.

To leave for the present the question how a Boys' Library should be formed, let us consider what kind of books it ought to contain: what it would contain if ideally managed. Now the first fact to remember is that it has got to be attractive to as many boys as possible; for it is even less possible to make a boy read a book that he doesn't want to than to make him play a game

that he doesn't want to. The latter is possible, but demoralizing in the long run, the former is not possible at all. The library has to compete with all the stuff that boys will read, if left to themselves, because the stuff promises interest, and gives so little trouble in the reading that they imagine themselves to have been interested when they have really been half asleep. I knew a boy—now an officer in His Majesty's army—who used to read every novel written by the late Mr. Henty. He had absolutely no brains, and it was probably the right thing for him to do. A library must cater for the duffer as well as for the boy of spirit; if intelligent boys are found eating duffers' food, a sensible parent or master will know how to discourage it. The real difficulty is that the young are liable to be taken in by shams, and shams must be excluded at the risk of unpopularity to the institution. One specimen of each kind of sham I would keep, gorgeously bound, and protected by the most awful kind of sacro-sanctity from destruction, and only allowed out in the most ceremonious way. With such conditions the library may even include 'Eric, or the World of School,' and specimens of the later work of Mr. Hall Caine and Miss Marie Corelli (unless, as 'Punch's' Monsieur Tropfort asserts, Mr. Hall Caine really wrote Marie Corelli too), and of the humour of Mr. Jerome. It is astonishing how much a strenuous official protection may do to procure indifference for what might attract if left to itself.

But the question how to make bad books unattractive is but the complement of the main

question, how to make good books attractive, and it is upon the answer to this latter that the success of a school library mainly depends. It must be admitted that with the boy who resolutely prefers a bad translation of Dumas to 'Treasure Island,' or 'Three Men in a Boat' to 'Pickwick,' there is not much to be done. After all, most boys have strange tastes at one time or another, and may be trusted to outgrow them; but for the boy with an open mind, for the waverer, much may be done by a well-arranged library. Arrangement is of the first importance. Let the reader know what he is going to get, whether by labelling compartments or by similar bindings, or by any clearly-expressed device. Classify your books plainly to the eye, and at any rate you deceive nobody. Under this heading of arrangement comes a principle of division which ought to obtain wherever possible, between the reference library and the circulating library. There are many books which a boy of fifteen or so would not be likely to want to take away with him, but which he might occasionally dip into in a spare hour if they were to hand, and be the better for it. I remember in particular that Kinglake's 'Crimean War,' and De Quincey's works, which were on the reference shelves of my house library at school, found readers in that position who would not have contemplated so lasting an attachment as 'taking out' a book implied. The reference library is the obvious place for nearly all poetry, except that it is equally true that nearly all poetry should be in the circulating library as well; for boys cannot be too much encouraged to

read poetry, and without much encouragement they will not do it. It is the place for big books—and boys ought to be familiarized with the outside, at least, of big books, even if they never go further; it is something to be aware that shilling editions do not represent the whole work of the human brain. The objection to a reference library is its expense, for it must be owned, in qualification of what was said above, that the books now contemplated are not cheap. On the other hand, the reference library may be very valuable without being large; if it contained nothing more than Boswell, Pepys, 'Cook's Voyages,' Whymper's 'Scrambles amongst the Alps,' Kinglake's 'Crimean War,' and a book on heraldry, it would still be worth having. But one stipulation must be made; whatever may be tolerated of necessity in poor print or paper in the circulating library, the reference books must be of the best form procurable. Here, at any rate, there must be no cheap type, no double columns, and no invertebrate bindings. It is almost as important for a book as for a picture that it shall be worth looking at.

The contents of the circulating library are easy enough to determine, up to a certain point. Fiction will be most in request, and you begin by putting into it all the classical English novels that you can lay your hands on in fairly solid octavo form; and since in a house of forty or fifty boys, and still more in a school of two hundred or three hundred, there are likely to be a few readers of French or German, or other foreign languages, a first-rate library would contain at least a few examples of fiction in those

languages. But I would have no translations—or at any rate no English translations, except those which are in themselves classic, like more than one of the translations of 'Don Quixote,' or Cary's Dante, or Urquhart's Rabelais (in Morley's edition, to be sure). An exception might be made in favour of Victor Hugo and Jules Verne, for Jules Verne's merits are not literary, and 'Les Misérables' ought to be read in any language rather than not at all.

There should be plenty of poetry; not that it will be much read, but because, as said above, any boy who will read poetry ought to find it at hand. The great poets should be there in full, as nearly as may be; after these, the choice should be guided by Platonic principles. Newbolt should be welcome; John Davidson and Stephen Phillips may be crowned with as much laurel as will please them, and conducted elsewhere. Of anthologies let us have as many as you will; it does not much matter whether they be good, bad or indifferent; a boy may be stimulated by mere curiosity to taste an anthology when he would not attack a whole author. Even the 'Elegant Extracts' of our grandfathers might find a place; at least they preserved from oblivion

'Perhaps it was right to dissemble your love,  
But why did you kick me downstairs?'

Shakespeare should be there in at least three editions, none of them expurgated. If a boy will read what he had better not, he had better read it in Shakespeare than elsewhere. I would give him the Globe Shakespeare, in spite of its print and

paper and double columns, and two sets in several volumes, such as that edited by Mr. Gollancz; not the Temple Shakespeare, for little books are out of place in a library such as ours. Natural history ought to be represented, either here or in the reference library, by such books as Bates' 'Naturalist on the Amazons'—to say nothing of White's 'Selborne'—but books merely made up out of natural history to sell need not be considered. Somewhere or other 'Elia' must find a place. No boy should grow up with an excuse for ignorance of Charles Lamb; but as a rule meditative and critical works will not find readers, and, in fact, whatever is included in the library besides fiction will be there rather by way of demonstrating its existence than as a likely bait for the appetite.

One serious problem will always be with us. 'Of the making of many books' we are told 'there is no end'; but of the space available for them there is. When that space is filled how is the library to go on growing? The right way to deal with this difficulty is to have, in theory at any rate, two classes of books: first the permanent, second the temporary. All books already recognized as classics will constitute the nucleus of the permanent part; all new books will begin as temporary residents upon the shelves, and after a period of probation will be either taken into the permanent division, or if the interest in them is not sufficiently keen, or their contents of merely ephemeral attractiveness, sold to the second-hand dealer. Perhaps it follows from this that a first-rate Boys' Library should subscribe to Mudie's; at



any rate where there are, as in most schools, a number of House Libraries, some modification of the Book Club system would be found useful and economical—so many books to be bought by a joint committee from all the libraries, and distributed for possession after they had been the round, each library having the first choice in rotation, and those books which nobody wanted to keep to be sold for the common chest. The chief objection to any scheme of this kind is that it would make a considerable demand upon the time of those who managed the business; and the time both of schoolboys and of their masters is apt to be pretty fully employed as it is.

Two other special features may be suggested. To balance the shelf of shams there might be a shelf of masterpieces. Telling boys what to admire is not a very wise or fruitful occupation; but if the housemaster has a literary standard, there is no reason why he should not hang it out; and if he were allowed, say, room for a dozen volumes, and his boys' committee room for another dozen on a shelf of honour, interest in the existence of such a thing as serious criticism would be stimulated without arousing a suspicion of being trifled with in the breast even of the Philistine. It is, perhaps, needless to say that unlike the shelf of shams, the shelf of honour should be the most accessible in the whole library, and the books procured in the form most convenient for reading.

The second suggestion concerns Translations of the Classics. Opinion and practice with regard to the use of translations in schoolwork has under-

gone a change. Where they used to be tabooed and the employment of them visited with punishment, they are now tolerated and even encouraged. But boys, if left to themselves, tend to use not the best translations, but the most literal; and the man who was brought up to look upon a 'Bohn' as a surreptitious and guilty thing finds his pupils wallowing in nameless abominations, beside which Anthon's 'Horace' is a masterpiece of scholarship, with the result that they neither learn how to translate Latin or Greek, nor how to frame a sentence of English. Now there is no reason why the boys' library—the reference library for choice—should not supply some, at any rate, of the best translations available of the classics, such, for instance, as Morshead's 'Agamemnon,' Munro's 'Lucretius,' and even Hobbes' 'Thucydides' and Greenwey's 'Tacitus' might find a place beside the work of modern scholars. The boy who has to get up a book of Horace in a given time in order to qualify to be a dentist will not look at them, but the boy with a taste for scholarship may; and even as the working man complained that he could pass eleven public-houses, but was obliged to turn into the twelfth, so the mute appeal of a whole row of real books may reform the appetite of the most incorrigible crib-biter.

Much more might be said as to what boys like to read and what they ought to read, and how the two are to be made to coincide; but the central fact, not always remembered, is that boys are young human beings, and that the state of mind of a young human being is analogous to that

of a young race; young races have splendid memories, no reasoning powers, are all imagination and appetites, and, for the rest, are at the mercy of associations. Therefore, of books as of other friends, it is true that 'The company of the good is a training in virtue, while that of the bad is its destruction.'

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