

The Specific Use of
a School Library.

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The Specific Use of a School Library.

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The relation between the school and literature is an important one. To be sure in Garfield's conception of a university, a log with himself at one end and Mark Hopkins at the other, books have no place, but we cannot all be blest with an education under so rare a spirit as this. In default we must "patch up" both as pupils and teachers, with that which master minds have left for us on the printed page.

Aside from this, each pupil will, sooner or later, come to the place where his further mental training will depend upon himself alone. In this crisis all depends upon his ability to choose for himself, books that will invigorate and quicken his mental powers rather than those that will enervate and deteriorate them.

Then too in the development of a child, following roughly the "periods" of Rosen crang, intuitive, imaginative,

and logical, if a teacher has means at hand she can more efficiently help a child in his progress.

But in the school system of today we are obliged in a large measure, to use books which cannot in any restricted sense be termed literature.

The problem for the teacher is then, "How can I best inculcate an appreciation and regard for true literature in those under my instruction. For the correct solution of this problem one turns naturally to the school library.

With the question of school libraries as with every question in all pedagogics we have the sub-division into the theoretic ideal and the practical real - what should a school library be and what material have we with which to work toward this ideal?

In our state of Kansas, we find in the study of School Law the following provision:

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" Library fund. — The several school districts of the state may, at the annual meeting in each year, vote a tax upon all the taxable property of the district, not to exceed two mills on the dollar, which tax shall be certified by the district clerk to the county clerk at the same time and manner as other school-district taxes are certified and the county clerk shall place the same on the tax roll of the county in a separate column, designating the purpose for which such tax was levied; and said tax shall be collected and paid over to the treasurer of said district in all respects as other school-district taxes are collected and paid: Provided, however, That in the districts where the taxable property of the district is more than \$20,000 and not more than \$30,000, there shall not be levied more than one and one-half mills on the dollar; and where the taxable property is more

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than \$30,000 and not more than \$50,000, there shall not be levied more than one mill on the dollar; and in all cases where the taxable property of the district shall exceed \$50,000, there shall not be levied more than one-half mill on the dollar.

How used. — The money so collected shall be used under the direction of the board of directors for the purchasing of a school-district library, and for no other purpose; and the district board in the purchase of books, shall be confined to the works history, biography, science, and travels.

Librarian, Rules. — The district clerk shall be the librarian unless the board of directors shall appoint some other competent and suitable person, who shall reside in the district, to perform the duties of that office; and the board shall have power to make

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such rules and regulations in regard to the management of said library as they shall deem best, and they shall revise and change such rules from time to time as the necessities of the case shall seem to require."

Under this provision the state has thirty-two school libraries of over one thousand volumes and ninety seven having between three hundred and one thousand volumes.

The conditions governing this state library fund are such that the teacher can have only limited control. In addition to these libraries which are all, except two, supported by taxation, the teachers of the state of Kansas have always been enthusiastic advocates of and workers in the cause of school libraries; and all over the state, in almost every

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school-house are libraries, ranging from a dozen volumes to a hundred, which bear witness to this interest. The funds are raised by various means from private subscription to the time-honored "box social." In one county in Kansas the fund raised by teachers during the season 1903-04 was more than a thousand dollars.

Inquiries into the method of use of these libraries elicited several facts. One was that the children, in almost every case had free access to the books and were permitted to take them to their homes. Another was that the library was used in many cases as a sort of reward of merit. For instance when a child had been satisfactory in deportment in proficient enough in his study to have learned his lessons before the study period of his class was up, he was allowed to

read a library book.

Let us now turn to the consideration of the ideal library for a school. First the keyword of every school library, more than of any other library, should be "standard". Care should be taken that every book in it should be, not only the work of a standard author but a standard work of its kind.

In a graded school there should be a library for each grade. Then the needs of each may be served. The children of a primary department can get as much good from a library adapted to them as High School pupils can from one adapted to them, and they certainly have as much right to it. One of the greatest values of a school library is the conservation of interest, and in a primary department library this value is

the predominating one. Hence the main object of a primary department library is to interest rather than to instruct directly. The selection of a library for children of primary age is a difficult and delicate task. As the children are in the imaginative epoch almost exclusively, the books they read can best appeal to them through their imaginations. Fairy tales if rhetorically arranged and skillfully written are acknowledged to be valuable. Fables are read eagerly if not too dry and if the morals may be omitted for most children revell in allegory and resent as much as any one having the teaching of a tale set down in flat statement. In the realm of verse the primary department library finds endless material. Children love poetry even if the thought is beyond their comprehension, if the

rythme is smooth. Much poetry especially for children is written, some of which is good but most of which is as inane as the expression on a wax doll's face. A child rightly resents such namby- pamby stuff even though he cannot say what it is ails it, hence it should be closely guarded against lest it give him the idea that literature is something without meaning or interest. The work of the best of American and English poets if carefully selected will be relished by children. Longfellow, Whittier, Wordsworth, some scenes from Shakespeare even, and Kipling are among children's favorites.

There are books of science that are written for children. These have a place in our school libraries.

with the caution, always, that in the attempt at simplification they do not become inaccurate and misleading.

As to the use of primary department libraries. Most primary classes are kept too much reading in their "readers". If, instead of one recitation each day, in reading from their text, a class period be spent in having them read and interpret a book from the library they would enjoy the change and turn to their regular lesson with heightened powers and renewed interest. The children who are enough advanced to be able to read without assistance may be allowed to draw the books for home-reading under guarantee that they will be returned in good shape. The scientific books may be

used by the teacher in the work of the "general class" in which she starts the children in various lines of study which their development indicates them capable of.

An intermediate library may be chosen from a much larger and more varied assortment of literature than a primary one. Fairy tales give way to truthful but wholesome stories of real life. History tales, both of ancient and modern history, biographical incidents, a little more complex series of science studies and still poetry, but of greater variation, will make up the ideal library for an intermediate department.

The intermediate department teacher has a great opportunity and a correspondingly great responsibility

in teaching children the use and value of cross-references. Geography may be given definiteness and interest by reading, in conjunction, books of travel. Beginning history may be relieved of its usual dryness and insipidity by the use of history tales and biographical incidents from the library. Examples of the principles of grammar may be found in the writings of standard authors; and an exercise of finding and copying sentences illustrating the use of parts of speech or the application of a rule, would be an agreeable and profitable change from the construction of such sentences. If judiciously used this method might be made of much help to the children in their own sentence construction and in their conversation as well.

In the intermediate department

library the elements of interest and instruction should just about balance each other in importance. Such a library should first of all have a good up-to-date dictionary and a students encyclopedia, and their use should be sedulously taught.

In the grammar school the pupils are far enough advanced to receive regular training in literature. They should have learned to use reference books and should be habituated in the use of dictionary and encyclopedia. They should be permitted the free use of the school library and encouraged therein.

The choice of a library for a grammar department should be governed by two conditions. The first of these is that, children at the grammar school age are en-

tering into the logical period where pure reason appeals to them if properly presented. The other is that children of this age like to read better than at any other time in their lives, perhaps and will read anything that comes in their way providing it has an interest. It is right here that many children are brought under the influence of improper books. These books have a fascination which is quite beyond the average child to resist of himself. The teacher and parents are responsible for him and should aid him by throwing in his way only the best literature which after all is the most truly fascinating. In view of these conditions grammar school pupils should evidently have a library

which will present difficulty enough in its use to escape being tiresome and childish but not be so abstruse as to repel the child and drive him to outside reading of his own choosing. Fiction should be allowed - not necessarily easy fiction and certainly none but by the best writers. Stories of travel and adventure are a particularly happy choice for children in this stage. They possess thrilling interest and are without the sentimentalism that some children are apt to run to. History and mythology - better the strong, verile mythology of the Northmen than the effete one of Greece and Rome, though an expurgated edition of that might be allowed - biography and poetry, in fact all sorts of good literature for any library if we exclude

that which is too abstract for young brains should have a place in this library.

Children of grammar school age should be taught to appreciate the author's art in the construction of his work. In no other way can they be so surely and effectively taught to know the good from the bad and to have a just contempt for the bad. This knowledge will also vastly help them in their own composition and will enlist their interest in their grammatical work.

For an ungraded school the ideal library should contain some elements of the libraries of each grade. These may be many or few according to the means at hand and must be in a proportion that seems just to the chooser of the library. The beginning should

be always a good dictionary and a student's encyclopedia. With these as a foundation as elaborate a structure as possible may be erected.

The greatest need in the average school, according to R. C. Metcalf of Boston, is rather teachers of greater literary taste who may be trusted as safe guides to a child's mind, than greater libraries. He thinks that when teachers come to understand and appreciate the need of literature in schools the school library problem will be solved.