The School Library

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THE SCHOOL LIBRARY.

Shall We Have One?

That depends on what you wish your school to be. Are you willing for it to remain unequipped, lacking the most important piece of apparatus next to seats and blackboard? Do you wish it to stand still while everything else is moving forward? Would you have it turn its back on a great opportunity that is almost thrust upon it? Do you feel that it is worth no effort to make the lives of your children fuller and richer? Do you wish them to remain slaves to an environment little wider than the range of their five senses and the senses of their neighbors? If so, you do not want a library.

If, on the other hand, you feel that your children should have as good a chance as any others; if you desire them to get that whole schooling of which the work of teacher and textbook is only half; if you wish to sharpen their wits, increase their intellectual power, and ennoble their ideas by contact with the brightest, the strongest, and the best minds of all the world; if you would like to put within their reach one of the keenest, least expensive, most refining and elevating means of pleasure; finally, if you would see your school a source and center of quickening and light to the whole community, you cannot afford to wait another session for a school library.

What Books Shall We Buy?

Choose, of course, from the excellent list of the State Board. Buy, first of all, books which will interest the children, which they will read for pleasure. Be sure to get some books for the smallest tots, and some tales of fighting, hunting, and travel for the boys of the "wild-Indian age." Books for higher tastes and works of reference may follow later.
The School Library.

How Shall I Use the Library?

The getting is merely a start. Buying a tool is not doing the work. To use the library successfully will call for your strongest effort and highest skill. The best teacher in the school should be the librarian. How can this great work be done successfully? At request, I make such suggestions as I can in answer to this question:

The first thing to do is to set definitely before your mind the aim of your library work. The main purpose undoubtedly, is to cultivate in pupils a love for good reading.

Next, make a study of the reading tastes of children. Learn their favorites, not as the fisherman learns the worms that the fish will bite, but as the housekeeper knows the viands that will please her guests, because they please herself. That is, develop in yourself a love for children's books and a familiarity with, at least, the chief favorites of the library. Suppose you resolve to read one child's book every fortnight of the next session.

In cultivating children's tastes, begin early. Tell good stories to the youngest; read good stories to the others, and soon they will want to read stories for themselves. No school program is so crowded that it cannot afford two or three periods a week for reading to the children. This reading will pay, not only in the finer culture, but in actual progress in the other studies.

Be ready to help pupils find books to their liking, but let the selection be their own. This, of course, takes for granted that you have not any impure books in your library; no others can hurt. Gain the pupils' confidence in your suggestions by never fooling them into reading something profitable under pretense that it is interesting. If, against your advice, a pupil insists on taking a book that is "over his head," let him try it. The best way to convince him that he cannot jump to the moon is to let him jump. The experiment will hurt neither him nor the moon, but it will increase his respect for your judgment.

Have attractive books within easy reach during school hours, that the pupils may read in odd minutes not required for their lessons. It is easier to prevent abuse of this
privilege than to dispense with the use of it as a promoter of order, to say nothing of its direct fruits. In this way many will get a start toward becoming readers, who otherwise would never taste the good of books.

Enlist the enthusiasm of the home. Encourage children to take books for their parents to read. Do all that you can to get parents interested in the children's own reading. Let the younger take books for the parents to read to them. Make the school library a neighborhood library.

Sometimes, in school, lead the children into an informal talk about the books that they have read and like best. It is remarkable how the contagion of interest will spread. Don't let an opportunity pass of having a pupil illustrate a point in the lesson by something that he has read.

Read part of an interesting book to the class, and then tell them that they can finish by taking it from the library.

With older pupils, supplement the classwork frequently, though not in large doses, by assigning parallel reading.

In conclusion, permit me to urge that you do not treat this library work as a side-issue. None of your classes surpass it in importance. The prime mission of our schools is to effect a general uplift of character. No part of our work can accomplish so much in this direction as the cultivation of a taste for good reading. Since our ideals are shaped by the company we keep, it must be of tremendous consequence that our children form such intimate associations with the noblest of earth as are possible only thru the favorite author. Let me guide the interest of a child, and I will form his ideals; give me the making of his ideals, and I will make or blast his character.

It was much more than half the truth that some one uttered: "Let fathers and mothers choose pleasure-books for their children, and they need care little who chooses their textbooks." Even so shrewdly practical an American as President Eliot quotes, with approval, "The uplifting of the democratic masses depends upon the implanting at schools of a taste for good reading."
How to Get a Library in Every Rural School.

We can assume, then, that the library is an indispensable element of teaching. I go further and assume that all agree that a neatly cased set of attractive books is one of the essential ornaments of the school house. On one plank of the educational platform all must stand: A library in every school in South Carolina. The only question is, How shall we get it?

Suppose you have taken charge of a school that shows no vestige of a library, in a community that has no conception of the need of one. Your first task is to begin overcoming the strangeness of the idea and creating a demand for books. Make the start yourself. Probably you have some reading books, histories, and geographies other than your regular textbooks, also some good magazines and story books. Take these as the nucleus of your library. The exercise of a little skill will start children to reading the stories or looking at the pictures for pleasure, and will make the older pupils feel the advantage of parallel references in geography and history. Once create in the children a taste for more books, and the library is pretty sure to come. Suggest to the pupils to lend their own nice books to the school for their classmates to read. The pride of ownership will often lead them to do so.

In some homes there are old magazines which the housekeeper, tho unwilling to destroy, would be glad to put out of the way. These may be obtained for the school thru newspaper notice or private request. Frequently "lend-a-hand" friends will be found who will gladly send current periodicals regularly, as soon as read.

While, as I have pointed out, you should start with acting, you had better follow this up with talking. Plead that the opportunity offered by the State Library law be not thrown away. Ask Trustees, patrons and public spirited people in general to subscribe. Emphasize the importance of a library as a necessary piece of school equipment. Be sure to tell them what others are doing. Exhort them not to be left behind. Impress the fact that it is the regular, decent thing to have a library. Ask why
their children should not enjoy as good advantages as others. Write to the State Superintendent of Education for literature on the subject, and distribute it among your patrons.

Start the children to talking for you. This is easy enough when once you have got them to love reading. While they will be your best advocates, their success will be greatly enhanced by getting the homefolks interested in the library on their own account. Encourage the pupils to take books which the parents will like to read. If practicable, organize a Literary or Educational Society, whose meetings shall be held at the school house. Its work will bring about a demand for books, and you may secure the aid of its members by proposing a combined school and neighborhood library. Be sure, however, that it contains a fair proportion of books that the young children will read for mere enjoyment.

These means, if backed by satisfactory class work, ought surely to be sufficient to raise the $10 requisite for State aid; but whether you can raise it or not, obtain all the money possible in this and other legitimate ways. Though you should get only $1.00, that would make a really profitable start.

The end will justify a school entertainment. Have on its program a short, ringing address in favor of the library by some speaker of influence. Stir up the young people of the neighborhood to give some sort of musical, theatrical, or other entertainment for the benefit of the library. I have known children to take interest in bringing contributions from home to a "hot supper," whose proceeds were to buy books. It is reported that at one school each pupil brought a weekly contribution of an egg, to be sold for the library cause.

Don't forget that every cent counts.

There are certain public documents which, though not exactly the kind of books that you would spend money for, are well worth getting free.

The United States Agricultural Reports and Bulletins would furnish reading, both instructive and interesting, to fathers and mothers. Other useful national publications
may be obtained thru your Congressman. Sometimes the State of South Carolina has valuable works for free distribution. Be on the alert for everything of this class. The bulletins of the colleges in the State may be had for the asking. The conclusion of the whole matter is that the school that has not some sort of a library is inexcusable.

Be ashamed, then, to have taught a school one session and leave it without a library.