

A Symposium on Juvenile Reading

The editors of The Saturday Review sent to a group of persons interested in the education of children from different angles a set of questions bearing on juvenile reading. We print below their responses.

John Dewey

THE question regarding children's reading starts a discussion in the mind of any thoughtful person which, if not "ragging," at least stirs many opposite and irreconcilable thoughts, for each of which something may be said. Were it not for one consideration, I should reach the conclusion that with the exception of very small children, the books written for adults, especially those which have attained the rank of classics, are the best reading for children. For the very young, it seems to me the best reading is the story of animal and child life, written preferably in a whimsical or at least semi-humorous style, where the wording is quite literal even though the subject-matter is highly imaginative. I do not mean myths and fairy tales, as much as an imaginative presentation of objects which are familiar; things the child sees, handles, eats, plays with, that attract his attention, presented in some unusual picture, but treated as far as style is concerned in a familiar and even prosaic way.

It is probably useless, in the flood of books for children and youth that pour from the press and that have such commercial pressure behind them, to urge for children of an older age the reading of classics, like the Iliad and Odyssey, Plutarch, and adaptations of them, like the Lambs' "Tales from Shakespeare." Yet if a movement in that direction could be started, I think it would do more than anything else to improve the standards of the reading of youth. In any case, I think good adult literature is better, with few exceptions, than that especially prepared for the young. The latter is too often written down to the supposed intellectual level of the young, is sentimental and falsely romantic, to say nothing of inferiority of style. The difficulty alluded to above is an over-emphasis, from the standpoint of youth, of romantic love. I do not have in mind here the contemporary definitely "sex" literature as much as the older style of love story, in which images and vague emotions are aroused far beyond any reach of present experience, and by which mental reactions that would come naturally later are prematurely and artificially fostered.

Lest it be thought I have in mind a forced, exclusive diet of classics, let me say that I think books of travel and adventure written for grown-ups provide excellent material. I recall a group of children who had read to them at about the same time Nansen's "Across Greenland" and Kipling's "Captain's Courageous"—certainly a book much superior to most of those which constitute our juvenile literature. The children were more eager for the former than for the latter. Of all reading for the young I think "stereotyped books, without literary value, but having plot interest," the worst.

Angelo Patri

WHAT makes a book good reading for children? Precisely those qualities that make a book good reading for adults. Very few books have been written for the junior audience with that idea to the fore. Until just the other day children's books were stodgy or mawkish or artificial, anything but real.

Authors who thought about writing books for children were rare and those who succeeded in doing so were rarer still. For the most part the generation of which I am one had to be content with such classics as "Robinson Crusoe," "Swiss Family Robinson," "Pilgrim's Progress," always done in small type on bad paper with scarcely a picture to lighten the way. From them I fled to the dear delights of the Henty books and the Rollos and the Old Sleuth tales.

For a time these were my world of books until one high day I discovered "Treasure Island." There's a child's book for you. Boy and man, you can read it again and again without once losing that sense of careless rapture that stole over you at the turn of the first page.

It is that first fine careless rapture that puts the soul into a book and marks it as immortal, a real book for children—and adults—for a real book knows neither age nor grade. The story ripples along like the song of a bonny, blithesome bird. Rich imagination must be in its creation, and joy amounting to rapture, and the spirit of play, and the carelessness of method and technique that is the touch of the true master and the overtone of art; and the sincerity that is the

essence of all good work must throb within its every measure.

Such a book comes to us rarely. It were too much to ask that it come everyday. Perhaps we should be content that it happens now and then to set the taste of the reader, lift the standard high, touch us all with classic beauty.

The children of to-day have a much wider field of choice than we had. The old sentimentality, the false ethic that marred the story book of the older day have departed together with the sickly heroine and the stupid hero. In their stead we have the dauntless "Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm," charming "Anne of Avonlea," bold, adventurous "Tonty of the Iron," sweet "Shen of the Sea," entrancing "Kari the Elephant," to mention but a few of my favorites. If these are not classics they are very close to it, for they are, I believe, very good books.

These and their kind are written in fine style and in good taste. They tell their story straightforwardly with never a hint of the deadly talking-down that is the blight of children's books. First-class authors have discovered that children are a keenly intelligent audience, deeply appreciative of good work, quick to respond to the touch of beauty, and they are giving them of their very best.

There is great hope, great promise of a fine body of children's literature in the next few years. There can be no richer gift to childhood. Nothing so lifts the spirit of youth as the book rapturously freighted with color and action and beauty. And in my opinion, there could be no book more worthy the writing than the one that did just that.

Arnold Gesell

WHAT is a balanced ration in children's reading? This is a provocative question because of gratuitous assumptions which lurk behind its reasonableness. It is a popular conceit that books are like diet and that a child's reading interest is like his appetite for food. Bacon lent his authority to this gastronomic concept and spoke of tasting, chewing, swallowing, and digesting the printed page. Perhaps this dietetic trend will lead to compiling official book lists in menu form with a coefficient of calorie values for the various kinds of pabulum!

If the idea of balanced ration is taken too gravely it will lead to artificial apportionments with the inevitable omission of important vitamins. The value of a given book for a given child often hangs upon all sorts of associated factors such as the circumstances under which the book was read, the mystery or grotesqueness of its illustrations, and a thousand idiosyncracies in the child's current individuality. In another month a similar book may have neither appeal nor nutritive value. We must grant some tolerance even for certain reading crazes that seize children. The material read may seem to us stereotyped and vapid; the ration may appear sadly out of balance; but in a growth sense it may none the less prove beneficial for the child.

There is no absolute scale of values for balancing reading rations. The child grows too quickly. An abundance of Mother Goose is excellent at one stage; it is arresive at another. At adolescence a browsing, desultory sampling in many pastures may be decidedly more developmental than a thorough assimilation of a few certified selections.

It is literally impossible to generalize about the needs of the numerous age levels from nursery to college. Individuals differ even more widely than age levels. Consequently there must always be a premium upon self direction and self discovery in reading fare. If this results in constant change, shows variety and upward trend, we may be content. The reading of every child should include romance, informative science, nonsense, humor, philosophy, beauty, history, and possibly some homily. But who will specify the volumetric and the dynamic units of the viands of the ever changing feast?

Alfred Adler

SO far as the influence of parents and teachers can be thrown it should promote reading of books of higher type in accord with the preference of the child. There should be the possibility of discussing and interpreting such books with an expert in education.

Up to the seventh year I believe it is advisable to interpret books or stories of all kinds to the children. Such oral discussion could be replaced by printing questions and answers in the back of the book for educational purposes. This I deem desirable, because it happens so often that children

misunderstand or overlook important views, or are impressed by those views not fitting in our present social life.

Dorothy Canfield Fisher

EVERYBODY has heard the story of the man who, wrought to frenzy by a vagueness in our national hymn, sang it with passion thus,

*Our hearts with rapture thrill
Like WHAT?? above*

I have before me a series of questions about children's reading, sent me by the *Saturday Review*.—"Do children read too much? Should older children read adult books? Are good detective stories bad for children? Should children read about sex?" and I find my vocal chords spasmodically tensing for a questioning bellow, "WHICH children?" Or rather, "Which child?"

What's the answer to the questions: "Are good detective stories bad for people? How should sex be treated in books for people?" The only answer I can think of is, "I'll tell you that if you'll tell me how big is a house?" And when my interlocutor asks blankly "What kind of a house?" answer him, "What kind of people?"

Do children read too much? Some do and some don't. Isn't it the obvious job of every parent to know which kind his children are? How about detective stories? They might be just what is needed by a boy who's slow in mastering the mechanics of reading. Often the trouble with such a child is that his interest has not been held closely enough to push him through the difficulties of the printed word. If he is strong-nerved and robust, not timid, not unduly sensitive, detective stories might be the making of him intellectually because through them he might acquire that speed in reading which is essential if he's to get much use out of books. But because that is true, you wouldn't want your high-strung, impressionable, afraid-of-the-dark little girl of the same age to read them, would you? But they are both "children." And only a parent, teacher, aunt, or someone who knows them personally well, can tell the difference between them as to which books are best for them.

Furthermore, in the case of even one child, what's best for him now may be stale, old fodder six months from now. A growing girl who now would be bored, or repelled, or bewildered by even a wise, humane treatment of sex problems in a book, might before she is an inch taller, be needing just that and nothing else. Only by daily, comfortable, intimate, frank talk on all sorts of topics, can one keep any track of a child's book-needs. To supply them blindly, out of booklists, even good booklists without which nobody can make a home, is exactly on a par with the old-woman habit of trying out every remedy for rheumatism which has benefited a neighbor's maladies, whether they were rheumatic or not.

What are parents for, anyhow?

John Bennett

MY own children have ever been at liberty to read anything in the house; and they have done so. Whether this was the best thing for them or not I have no way of knowing. I did the same thing when I was young, and do not know at all whether it was the best thing for me or not. Our library door stands open: they may read whatever they please.

Opinions as to literary criticism for several years have been the cause of ceaseless controversy. I am no controversialist. I am not sure, however, that standards of literary criticism in this country during the past ten years have so much been raised as they have been broadened.

It takes younger men than myself to entertain positive opinions. I have come to be of an extremely catholic and open mind. I believe that it is better a child should read anything not foul than that he should read nothing whatever. Except it be deliberately pornographic I am convinced that to read anything is better than to read nothing.

When I was a child "Don Quixote" un-abridged was read aloud to me, "Westward Ho," "Little Men," "Ivanhoe," Grimm's Fairy Tales, "The Arabian Nights." As soon as I was able to read we had "Little Corporal," *Harper's Weekly*, Artemus Ward, "Roughing It," "Innocents Abroad," "Gilded Age," "Tom Sawyer," Barham's "Ingoldsby Legends," "Canterbury Pilgrims," Ledyard's "Ninevah," Champollion's "Egypt," "The Black Arts," "Adventures and Escapes of Baron Trenck," histories of England, Spain, Switzerland, mythology

of Greece and Rome, Hans Andersen, Strutt's "Sports and Pastimes," "Caricature History of the Three Georges," Bewick's "Birds," "Natural History of Selborne," Webster's Dictionary, "Robinson Crusoe" complete, "Gulliver's Travels" complete, Baron Munchausen, Lane's "Arabian Nights," the Cincinnati *Enquirer* from the Fight on the Little Big Horn and the Prize Ring news to Paddy Ryan's arrival, all the current political news, Tweed Ring cartoons, and Greeley Campaign, the *Scientific American*, Wilson's Ornithology, "Science of Familiar Things," DuChailu, Livingston, Stanley, Mungo Park, Marco Polo in Bayard Taylor's series of Travel and Adventure, lives of Daniel Boone and Davy Crockett, Weems's life of Marion and of Washington, "Green Mountain Boys," "Swamp Steed," Powell's "Report on Exploration of the Colorado Canyon," a thriller; "Swallow Barn," "Nick o' the Woods," "Horseshoe Robinson," Ballentyne's boys' books, Oliver Optic, Harry Castlemon, Horatio Alger, Aesop's Fables with Jno. Tenniel's unforgettable illustrations; files of London *Punch*, files of *Harper's Monthly* magazine from 1853 forward with Porte Crayon's papers, Abbott's "Napoleon," etc., London *Graphic*, *Putnam's Magazine*, Longstreet's "Georgia Scenes," "Wild Western Scenes," "The Bushrangers," Gaboriau's novels, "File No. 113," etc.; all of Scott, Dickens, Mayne Reid, Charles Reade, Capt. Marryatt, Charles Lever, Samuel Lover, Cooper, Dumas, "Tom Cringle's Log," "White Jacket," "Two Years Before the Mast," "Adventures of Reuben Davidger," "The Knickerbocker History of New York," "Sleepy Hollow Tales," the books of Noah Brooks, J. T. Trowbridge, Louisa M. Alcott, "Scottish Chiefs" and "Thaddeus of Warsaw," "Robin Hood," "King Arthur's Round Table," Kane's "Arctic Explorations," Knox's Travels in China and Japan, all of the Beadle's Dime Novels we could get our hands on, "Shorty," "Muldoon the Solid Man," "Frank Reade and His Steam Outfit," "Old Sleuth," "Jack Harkaway," "Dick Lighthouse," "Golden Days," *Fireside Companion*, *Saturday Night*, sporting news in the New York *Police Gazette*, the publications of Tousey and Small, Gay & Fitzgerald, Frank Leslie's "Boys of America," "Annals of the Prize Ring," Little Classics, containing Poe's prose tales, tales of heroism, etc., the humorous works of Josh Billings and Petroleum V. Nasby, and the capital small-print stories in Howe's "History of Ohio," with a dash of Eugene Sue.

We read these, yes, and dozens more, just that way, higger-mugger, rumble-tumble, without order or arrangement, and with no further intent than a boy's desire for information and amusement. We got both a-plenty: whether to our ultimate profit or not far be it from me to say in a world of battling opinions.

We read all and everything that we could beg, borrow, buy, or purloin; we never missed the daily paper.

No doubt when the last trump sounds and we all line up for that last once-over, some bright angel will say "You could have read to greater profit." Perhaps we might: perhaps we might not. The psychologists and sophisticates of today no doubt could have prepared a better course of reading for us; I doubt if they would have amused us more. And that was our purpose then. That was a dark age.

Anne Lyon Haight

SHOULD older children in this industrialized and sophisticated age read the same kind of (or perhaps the same) books as adults are reading?

This question has been a vital one for centuries and its origin can be traced as far back as the history of printing itself. Caxton printed a book of etiquette and morals for children, and deWorde, "The Wise Child of Three Year Old," who could answer the terrible question of "sage enfant, how is the sky made?" These books bored them, and as children refuse to be bored they turned to those first books printed for their elders, "Robin Hood," "Le Morte d'Arture," and Aesop's Fables. Living in a world of their own, as children do, they found in these books the romance, adventure, folklore, and myth that absorbed and interested them, and the more serious deeper meanings of allegory or satire failed to trouble them. Even as late as the seventeenth century the books intended for children consisted almost exclusively of morals, manners, etiquette, and education, and it is amusing to know that Milton raised his voice in protest at this meager fare. But again the children refused to be bored and turned for amusement to the horrors of the chapbooks, penny plain

and tuppence colored, considered by John Fox, author of the "Marters," to be "dangerous and insidious literature for the corruption of the young." It was not until the end of the century when Perrault wrote his "Fairy Tales" that we find books written definitely for the amusement of children. In these stories they found those things which they themselves had read into and dug out of the adult books. From these early tales has grown the extensive literature for children to-day, and perhaps it is significant that even though they have so many books of their own now they still continue to read grown-up ones, and our problem in this sophisticated age is just as troublesome.

There are three classes of books not written for them which children read the most.

First—the classics, some of which they will never read if they do not when they are young, such as the novels of Sir Walter Scott. There seems to be a period when their romance appeals very strongly. The same thing applies to the stories of James Fenimore Cooper, and after the first chapters have been mastered the adventure becomes thrilling.

Second, are the books about what is happening in the world to-day. Lindbergh's "We," Count Luckner's "Sea Devil," the romantic science of Will Beebe, Commander Ellsberg's "On the Bottom," and so forth. Another class is the type of literature that is enjoyed by all ages at all times. "The Foxhunting Man," by Siegfried Sassoon, "Drums," by James Boyd, "Ghand the Hunter," by Dhan Gopal Mukerji, the works of Kipling, Stevenson, and Barrie.

These three classes have definite value to the child. They supplement the imaginative and narrative literature of their own and by broadening the child's interest provide an important foundation for intelligent development into maturity.

Quite obviously there are also types of adult books that are not suitable for children. Books treating of abnormalities, of very controversial subjects, and of unpleasant situations are not going to help in their development, for their minds and experience of life are not such that they can form judgments of what we call "new ideas" that are diametrically opposed to every idea that they have been brought up to believe in. However, I am still old-fashioned enough to believe that children will not concern themselves with these books if they are surrounded by the right kind.

There have never been as many excellent books to choose from as now. Notwithstanding the wide selection of today, children are going to continue reading what interests them whether it be juvenile or adult fiction and I really do not believe that the industrialization and sophistication of the age will change the situation, but the improvement in modern books written expressly for children may.

Anne Carroll Moore

WHAT is a balanced ration in children's reading?

Who shall say without knowing a great many books and something of the natural taste and inclination of the individual child in question? What is meat and drink to one may lead to mental starvation, stagnation, or complete boredom with books to another.

Children read for one of two reasons, for sheer enjoyment, or to find out things they want to know from books about animals or humans, mechanics or aviation. Any balanced ration must take into account the full nourishment of the imagination and the steady assimilation of accurate factual information by growing, changing minds. It is precisely this element of growth and change, the abandonment, temporary or permanent, of earlier choices, the reaching out for something new and strange, for something mysterious, unwisely forbidden it may be, the rejection of well-intentioned but poorly timed advice about books somebody else has read, that makes the provision of reading rations for one's own children or the children of a great city so incomparably difficult and so unendingly delightful an experience.

Difficult because one must keep abreast of what is going on in the world without losing one's grip on the timeless satisfaction to be found in books which are perennial in their appeal, delightful because one relives one's own youth in another century and with the constant reminder that literature is still going on. The realities of today were the marvels, the undiscovered countries, of the '90's when my work with children in the Pratt Institute Free Library began. Theories concerning children's reading were as plentiful then as now, books were fewer in number and, on informational subjects, immeasurably poorer in quality.

How much fewer they were a single instance brings poignantly to my mind by the remarkable photographs of "Animals Looking At You" (The Viking Press), a translation from the German of the keen observations and comments of an animal lover which would have held the boys big and little of my children's room spellbound while I read or told what I had found in the book. For lack of such a book as this, for lack of any of the present day variety of books about animals, I ransacked natural histories and popular magazines and wrote out readable accounts of the animals included in an exhibition of pictures arranged in family groups. And to whom did I turn for encouragement in this undertaking but to the man who of all men I had then met knew most about animals—the man who had just come to organize and direct the New York Zoological Park—Dr. William T. Hornaday, whose own writings and encouragement of others have contributed richly to a field of very great significance in this matter of balanced rations in children's reading? More intimate personal acquaintance with the animals of nursery rhyme, folk lore and fable and those of the Jungle and the Zoo is both clarifying and stimulating to children or grown ups. As a child I did not like books about animals. As a librarian seeking to understand and develop a variety of reading tastes by children (among them a taste for Kipling's "Jungle Book" for which it was then necessary to read aloud to persuade children to take it home) found it absolutely essential to know more about animals and I gradually acquired a new taste which proved an open sesame to other doors.

I think the crux of the whole matter is this,—that the better one comes to know children and the books they are reading, and like to read, the less evident becomes the need of the measuring rod and the clearer the more elusive flash of divination which has ever been the way of passing on the book one has loved or has learned from to another. Next to the joy of discovery for one's self, to which I would always yield first place, is the joy of sharing what one has actually experienced for one's self. Children respect actual knowledge of books and their relative values when honestly stated.

Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt

SHOULD older children in this industrialized and sophisticated age read the same kind of (or perhaps the same) books as adults are reading?

That depends largely on what the adults are reading. I am, however, all in favor of children from the age of thirteen on being given a free run of a good library, particularly if they have in the family people who, besides reading merely modern books, can join with their children in discussing the old classics and give them a taste and an appreciation of good literature.

Much that I read as a child was due to the fact that I had a young aunt who had enthusiasms and loved to talk about them, and I still read certain things with the old comments and discussions ringing in my ears. If this is done with modern books also, I do not think that young people will suffer from reading them, even if certain problems are presented to them at a rather immature age.

The great thing for the children of today is to form the habit of reading, so that they may escape sometimes from their surroundings into different ages and different moods.

Louise H. Seaman

I HAD not realized that myth, romance, and sentiment were "characteristics of the best children's books, as the Editors of *The Saturday Review* imply. I wonder if they are. The modern feeling against so-called "fairy tales" would be ignorant if it included all epics and folk lore. The great myths of the world hold embedded its greatest hero stories. Is Odysseus really so far away from our real world? Is Herakles quite alien to our daily struggles? Is Finn McCool so completely a dream hero? The question asks too many questions in one. But as to mythology, I think anyone who rules out tellings of the Greek legends as done by Padraic Colum, of the Irish as done by James Stephens, of the Bible as in the King James and the Moulton arrangements, of King Arthur as in Howard Pyle or Malory arranged by Pollard—well, he is ruling out the bases of all literary understanding. Children "fall for" such reading at different ages. Suppose these lost worlds do, for a while, become very real to them? Suppose for some days, weeks, months, a year, they wear armor, shout ringing heroic phrases, dream of goddesses and dragons? Is this so different from adult

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The Books of My Childhood

By LAURA E. RICHARDS

MY mother has often told me that one day, when I was about four years old, she found me lying on the floor with a book before me, turning the pages carefully, and reciting the ballad of "Fair Annie of Lochroyan." On being interrogated, I said I was "reading." I have been reading ever since.

I have the volume now, its bright blue cover dimmed to gray; "Thalatta," a volume of sea poems, compiled by the Reverend Samuel Longfellow (brother of the poet) and someone else; an excellent collection, which has been a lifelong friend to me. It contained other ballads, too: "Sir Patrick Spens," "The Inchcape Rock," and Charles Mackay's splendid "Sea King's Burial," which I do not find in modern anthologies. Ballads, old and new, have always been among the "chief of my diet." I could never get enough of them; so was it when I was a babe, so it is now I am a grandame. My mother, Julia Ward Howe, began it, I suspect, as she began most of my reading for me (except what I owe to my father, of which anon). It was she, of course, who repeated "Fair Annie" to me till it was my own; and "Lord Thomas and Fair Elinor," sung in her silver voice, antedated even that. I may or may not be forgiven for quoting Andrew Fletcher of Saltoun's "very wise man," who said that "could he make the ballads of a nation, he would not care who made the laws."

In the 'fifties we were not smothered, as we are to-day, in "Children's Books." I had "Aunt Effie's Rhymes," that clear, delicious little spring, from which anthologists have been dipping crystal draughts ever since. If I ever knew who "Aunt Effie" was, I forget now, but the blessing of a whole generation of children must attend her.

I had Grimm, of course, and Hans Andersen, and knew them by heart; and "Merry Tales for Little Folks," a notable volume, edited by Madame de Chatelain; and "The King of the Golden River," a lifelong joy, one of the most precious of all children's books. Then there were "The Rose and the Ring," and "The London Doll" and "The Country Doll," and Miss Alcott's dear "Flower Fables," of which she was ashamed, she told me, in later life, but which I loved dearly. And "Tales from Catland," greatly beloved; and "Holiday House," ever delightful, and reprinted, I am happy to say, of late years; and, oh! "Rainbows for Children," and Mayne Reid!

Of course, we had the "Wonder Book" and "Tanglewood Tales"; I cannot remember when we did not have them; but I did not stop there with Hawthorne. I delighted in "Twice-Told Tales" and "Mosses from an Old Manse." These I read over and over, till I knew them almost by heart. "Howe's Masquerade," "Rappaccini's Daughter" (most terrible of all), "Lady Eleanor's Mantle," "The Great Carbuncle." And these bring me to Irving, to the "Tales of the Alhambra," and "Wolfert's Roost," and "The Sketch-Book." "The love of lovely words" has always been strong in me; the very title, "The Adelantado of the Seven Cities," brings a thrill even to-day.

I cannot tell when I began upon Scott and Dickens; they, with the Bible and Shakespeare, seem in memory a kind of foundation for everything else. I fancy my parents read them aloud to us all, beginning with my elder sisters; I probably listened and assimilated more than I knew at the time. There is a deep familiarity that seems to come from the beginning of things, as with "Mother Goose" and Lear's "Nonsense Book." My father was our chief exponent of Scott and Dickens. He read, in half hours snatched from the service of humanity, and we listened, never supposing he had anything more important to do. No "simplified editions" (*horresco referens*) for the Howe children. The splendid sentences rolled out as they were written, in the deep, melodious, unforgettable voice. If we did not understand every word, what did it matter? We heard the sound, the glory of them; the meaning could wait.

"Thy words, O Nazarene, might create anger, did not thy ignorance raise compassion."

Could any child fail to thrill over those magic pages of the "Talisman"?

But our parents were the two busiest people in the world; many books, of course, we had to find for ourselves. There were plenty of them; they reached appealing hands—titles, to be exact—from every shelf, in every room. I had a bowing acquaintance with the Great in all languages, living and dead. My mother's German philosophers, Kant, Hegel, Spinoza—how familiar were their backs! I could not read them, any more than I could read "Nowy Slownik," a

Polish work in many volumes, but they were friends, somehow, as were the Greek and Latin classics, and the *Théâtre Française*.

Other book-sanctuaries I did in some sort penetrate, owing to their illustrations. My first glimpse of Homer (*pace* John Keats) was not through Chapman, but through Flaxman's illustrations, which brought Homer alive to me at an early age. The same kindly Norseman led me through Dante, with horrified fascination. I know exactly what the Seventh Hell looked like. N.B. These volumes, splendid quartos rich with vellum and gilding, with superb print and margins, were stolen by a drunken gardener, and sold, one supposed, for drink. It seems a pity; I have seen no Dantes like them.

Perhaps Shakespeare, too, may have come to me in this way. Certainly among my earliest memories are those of the great folio copy of Boydell's "Illustrations of Shakespeare," bound in diamond calf, over which I would hang—it seems now—for hours together. I am very sure that I was intimate with Jack Falstaff before I ever read a word about him, and with Sir Joshua Reynolds's exquisite Puck, and with all that goodly company.

Hogarth's terrible folios, too, were painfully familiar, and there was a dreadful volume on smallpox, with life-size colored plates showing every stage of the disease. Horrid, morbid little girl! I would open it and shut it, and run away—and come back!

(The big purple morocco Bible had no pictures, which had in some ways its advantages. I somehow think of my father reading that; but it was my mother who sang the hymns, and all the songs in the world, in all languages.)

In the same way I made friends with Thackeray. His own and Richard Doyle's delightful pictures introduced me to the Newcomes and Pendennis and the rest, but I have Mr. Doyle alone to thank for "Brown, Jones and Robinson," a precious volume, which taught me much about foreign parts.

I may here note that when in later years I came to seek the friendship of Herodotus of Halicarnassus, while his bright purple sides surprised me, his sober faded gray back was as familiar as possible.

The first novel I read to myself was "John Halifax." I am sorry to say I find John dull now, but then I enjoyed him greatly. And there was "Jane Eyre," which some of my schoolmates were not allowed to read.

But all this written, and little or nothing said about poetry other than ballads! I would rather read poetry than eat my dinner any day. It has been so all my life. Coventry Patmore's admirable "Children's Garland" and "Thalatta" were my first anthologies; Mrs. Browning, Whittier, and Tennyson, my first individual poets. I cannot have been more than eight or ten when, as I have described in my "When I Was Your Age," it was my delight to go and read to an old blind woman, in the workshop of the Perkins Institution (then at South Boston), the "Rhyme of the Duchess May," "Lady Geraldine's Courtship," and other highly romantic ballads of the Lady of Casa Guidi. Poor old Margaret! I have often wondered what she made of it.

I was about thirteen when I came to Shelley and Coleridge, and new worlds opened about me. A friend of my father's, Mr. Horatio Woodman, read "Christabel" to me. I can remember jumping up in my excitement, and walking up and down the room, as the magic lines sang in my ears. I was a great girl of sixteen before I discovered Browning, and for some years I walked hand in hand with him and Rossetti—and always Shelley. I was late with Keats, I cannot imagine why.

But what says Capt. Corcoran?

*Though I'm anything but clever,
I could talk like that forever!*

I am already overrunning the allotted space.

My general idea, as I look back through the long years, seems to have been, "if you see a book, read it, especially if it is poetry!" My education would seem to stand on a solid (!) foundation of fairy stories, romance, and poetry, with more or less history tucked in here and there by way of mortar.

Alas! and pondering these things, I seem to hear the kind voice of my good brother-in-law, the Learned Professor.

"My dear Laura," he says, "mathematics, chemistry, and physics are the tripod on which modern education stands."

Alas! But what a good time I had!