

THE TRAINING OF CHILDREN

CHAPTER 26: READING

1. Ought not some care to be exercised with regard to the books which children read?

Yes; the greatest care possible, seeing that very frequently much effort spent in various ways to make children good and Christ-like is more than counteracted by the books read in their leisure hours. There never was an age in which so much pernicious matter was published, and all hurtful literature should be carefully kept out of the children's way.

2. What class of books do you recommend for the children?

(1.) Children should, when old enough, and sufficiently instructed to understand, be taught to read the Bible systematically.

(2.) Children should read, morning and evening and at noonday, the portion of Scripture marked for the day in the Salvation Soldier's Guide." Explanations and illustrations, so far as there is opportunity, should be given by parents on what is read.

(3.) While children are young the facts and teachings of the Bible, with explanations adapted to their age and intelligence, should be supplied them. Any number of books of this description can be obtained, such as "The Peep of Day," and others of that class.

(4.) After the Bible, we recommend for the children of Salvationists, the "Little Soldier," the "War Cry," and other publications of The Salvation Army, together with such other books as are calculated to edify and instruct them in all that concerns a godly life.

(5.) To these may be added books of history, biography, natural history, travels in foreign lands, and others of a good sound moral character.

3. Would you forbid little children to read the storybooks ordinarily got up for them,

THE TRAINING OF CHILDREN

and generally thought necessary for their entertainment?

We should distinctly forbid "Jack the Giant-killer," "Goody Two-shoes," "Jack and the Bean-stalk," and all the fairy-tale nonsense put together, with, we are sorry to say, most of the so-called "moral and religious" stories which are usually thought proper reading for the children.

It is just as wicked and as stupid, if not more so, to instill silly rubbish into the minds of children, as into the minds of men. Why it should be thought right – nay, essential – in the one case more than in the other we never could comprehend. But, as we have said elsewhere, the intelligence of children is generally underestimated, and, consequently, any foolish trash is thought good enough for the little ones so that it makes them laugh and passes away the idle hours.

4. But is it not desirable that there should be books which meet the love of the wonderful and strange, which is so strong in children?

Yes, it may be. But the love of the marvelous can be met and satisfied just as easily by facts, and facts which are far stranger than fiction, of which the world is full; so that there is no need for doing this with a pack of stupid lies, which are sooner or later found out to be such by the children.

Begin with the facts of the Bible – its history and miracles – and go on to books which describe other facts and other realities, as wonderful as anything in romance or fairyland can possibly be. Take, for instance, the wonders of natural history – the different animals in various lands – their nature, shape, and modes of life. Take the wonders revealed to us by the microscope. Go to the ocean and describe its inhabitants. Take the telescope and tell the children of the innumerable starry worlds above them. Take the varied tribes of men, their history and habits, and the ways in which they conduct themselves in war or in peace. In short, without fiction, the past, present, and future are full of facts which will not only entertain the children, but instruct and profit them also.

5. Then you are opposed to novel-reading by children?



The
William Booth
Collection

THE TRAINING OF CHILDREN

Most certainly we are. Indeed, we would go to the utmost possible extreme in the opposite direction. Ordinary novels or love-stories should be kept from children as you would keep rank poison from them. The action of the ordinary novel upon the minds of children is pernicious in the extreme, making them dissatisfied with their present position and condition in life, and filling them with unnatural ambitions and desires. Novels make the duties of the everyday life of children and everybody else insipid, create and develop an unnatural precocity, and altogether destroy that beautiful, simple, child-like spirit which we admire so much in children, and which we ought to make every reasonable sacrifice to preserve.

6. Ought parents to acquaint themselves with the character of the books their children read?

It has ever been the rule with us in the training of our children, that they should never read a book with the bearing and contents of which we were not ourselves familiar.