

**BOOKS AND READING  
FOR THE  
YOUNG. A REPRINT  
FROM A STATE REPORT**

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Books and Reading for the Young. A Reprint from a State Report by James H. Smart

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**JAMES H. SMART**

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# BOOKS AND READING

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## FOR THE YOUNG.

A REPRINT FROM A STATE REPORT.

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BY

JAMES H. SMART,

SUPERINTENDENT PUBLIC INSTRUCTION,

STATE OF INDIANA.

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O N

BOOKS AND READING FOR THE YOUNG.

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I.

INTRODUCTION.

The public school teaches its children to read. It opens to them a world of vast and varied literature. There are good books, good magazines and good papers, and there are bad books, bad magazines and bad papers. While the printing press is thus a great engine of civilization, it is at the same time a great instrumentality for evil. As there is no better way to protect a child from evil than to make him a lover of good literature, so there is no surer way to corrupt him than by bringing him in contact with bad literature. The public school teaches the child to read, but it does not teach him what to read or how to read. It gives him the ability to interpret the printed page, but it fails in a great measure to cultivate in him a taste for that which is pure, elevating and instructive. It must not be forgotten that by giving the child the ability to read, we put it in his power to read the worst kind of books, and that, if left to himself, he will be quite as likely to take poisonous mental food as to take wholesome mental food. Indeed I think that, in view of the attractive garb in which vicious literature is clothed, he will be more likely to read to his injury than to his profit. The person, then, who teaches children to read and fails to cultivate in them a taste for good literature, puts an instrument into their hands which may possibly be used by them to their own destruction.

There are four important questions connected with this subject which should be brought to the attention of all those who are interested in the welfare of children; these are:

1. To what extent are our children under the influence of bad literature?

2. Is the public library an adequate remedy for the evil arising from bad literature?

3. What can the teacher do to guard the children from the danger?

4. Is the parent relieved from responsibility when he founds a public library and maintains a public school?

I have, on various occasions, by public lectures and by private conversation, called attention to these questions, and I think I can perform no better service to the school children of the State than by endeavoring to answer them in this report. In pursuit of this purpose I have taken the liberty of making extracts from speeches and addresses upon this subject already printed. I also print four lists of books for children, prepared at my request by competent persons, which I confidently recommend to the teachers and people of the State. I also print several papers which have been prepared especially for this report, as follows:

1. Reference books, by Mary W. Hinman, of Laporte.
2. History clubs and reading circles, by Mrs. May Wright Sewall, of Indianapolis.
3. Reading for the young, by Mrs. Lucius B. Swift, of Indianapolis.
4. Books and reading, by Rev. O. C. McCulloch, of Indianapolis.

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## II.

### ON BAD LITERATURE.

The extent to which vicious literature is read by the youth of this country is alarming. Tons upon tons of it are sent out from the larger cities all over the country, and our children read it and are demoralized by it. If one doubts this, let him read the reports of Anthony Comstock or let him spend an hour at the news stands

in our larger cities and towns; or, what is better, let him inquire of any teacher of youth who has given the subject attention.

I am reliably informed that a large part of the bad literature that goes out of New York is sent to the great west; and I know from personal observation that much of it comes to the State of Indiana. The circulation of bad literature has become so extensive in New England that it has called out the following appeal signed by such men as Noah Porter, Theodore D. Woolsey, Francis A. Walker, Leonard Bacon, Francis Wayland and James E. English:

We desire to call attention to the cheap, trashy literature which is demoralizing the youth of our country. In this class we notice the paper named *The New York Boys' Weekly*, with a reputed circulation of 40,000, and *The Boys of New York*, with a reputed circulation of 50,000. These papers contain stories of the most sensational and slangy character, judging by the titles, of which we name the following: "Dashing Dick, King of the Highway," "Yankee Claude Duval, the Dashing Knight of the Road," "Corkey, or the Tricks and Travels of a Supe," "Shorty, Jr., or the Son of his Dad," "Bang Up, or the Boy Ranchero," etc., etc. We see not one redeeming trait in these or other papers of this class. We are informed that many of the advertisements in their columns are of the most villainous kind. Will you not do what you can to warn your readers against the peril that besets our youth? \* \* \*

Our object is not to advertise any periodical in place of those we deprecate, but only to warn the public of a danger suspected by few and realized by fewer still.

I also quote from a very able paper of Prof. William G. Sumner, of Yale College, which appeared some time since in Scribner's Monthly. Let all read it, let all ponder it.

Few gentlemen, who have occasion to visit news offices, can have failed to notice the periodical literature for boys, which has been growing up during the last few years. The increase in the number of these papers and magazines, and the appearance, from time to time, of new ones, which, to judge by the pictures, are always worse than the old, seem to indicate that they find a wide market. Moreover, they appear not only among the idle and vicious boys in great cities, but also among school-boys whose parents are careful about the influences brought to bear on their children. No student of social phenomena can pass with neglect facts of this kind—so practical and so important in their possible effects on society.

These periodicals contain stories, songs, mock speeches, and negro minstrel dialogues—and nothing else. The literary material is either intensely stupid, or spiced to the highest degree with sensation. The stories are about hunting, Indian warfare, California desperado life, pirates, wild sea adventure, highwaymen, crimes and horrible accidents, horrors (tortures and snake stories), gamblers, practical jokes, the life of vagabond boys, and the wild behavior of dissipated boys in great cities. This catalogue is exhaustive. There are no other stories. The dialogue is short, sharp, and continuous. It is broken by the minimum of description and by