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Children's leisure-reading tastes and habits in relation to age, sex, intelligence and other factors

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Children's Leisure-reading Tastes and Habits
in Relation to Age, Sex, Intelligence
and other Factors.

By

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INTRODUCTION

At each stage of progress towards universal literacy, at each extension of the means of disseminating ideas and information, at each new attempt to find a wider public for literature and the arts, there have been some to claim that our cultural standards are endangered. The first circulating libraries, the popular press, cinema, radio, television, even the early education acts, have all in turn been blamed for debasing public taste. The anxieties often expressed today need not perhaps be taken more seriously than previous premonitions of disaster, but no-one concerned with education can afford to leave out of account the many influences which affect, for good or ill, every effort to raise the level of our cultural life. In particular, the teacher whose purpose it is to improve the quality of children's reading is soon aware that the influence of the relatively few well-chosen books he may prevail upon his children to read at school is all too often out-weighted by the bulk of the reading matter they consume without prompting in their leisure time.

It is important, therefore, not only for the immediate purpose of school education, but also for the wider aim of raising the level of popular taste, to know how reading habits are first developed, what influences help to form our early reading tastes, what kinds of books children prefer to read at different stages, and what is the nature of the appeal they make. At the same time, it is not easy to lay aside our adult prejudices when considering the books which children voluntarily

read. Judged by adult standards, few of them have any literary merit; the majority are of an ephemeral kind, and even for their readers have only a transitory appeal. This alone is enough to arouse the suspicions of older people, especially of those whose literary training has disposed them to have regard for certain timeless and universal qualities in books. For children, these are not relevant considerations: they can despise wholeheartedly today the very book they treasured a few months ago. Nevertheless, that book may have served its turn, and borne its reader one more step towards mature reading. We need to guard ourselves, therefore, against condemning the books enjoyed by children merely because they do not conform to certain prescribed canons. The task of the teacher, after all, is not to impose upon children certain books and to proscribe others, but to ensure that at each stage in their development the enjoyment they derive from reading is as full and deep as it possibly can be. We have to accept that the books which children will enjoy are those which speak to their condition, and that by and large they have an intuitive awareness of the kind of book which meets their needs. There is nothing to be gained in prevailing upon children to profess in school standards alien to those they apply in their leisure reading. They express their true tastes, not by protesting their regard for this or that classic, but in the quality of their daily reading.

This does not mean, of course, that the teacher can afford to temporize with the trivial and the worthless; it means that he asks himself, not whether a book is good or bad in any absolute sense, but whether by reading it a given child is enabled to advance towards more mature reading. The teacher formulates his strategy, so to speak, in

the light of his understanding of what is meant by literary merit and cultivated taste; his tactics are determined by his knowledge of his pupils' capacities and needs. It is not a matter of insisting relentlessly on their reading at all times nothing but the best, but of bringing together the right book and the right child at the right time.

His main concern, that is to say, is that his children's reading be progressive, that each child should read books which challenge his growing powers of thought, feeling and imagination, and stimulate him to more ambitious sorties into the field of reading. We are familiar with the notion of progressive exercises in various branches of school work, including that of reading in the mechanical sense, but the idea of progressive reading for pleasure is less familiar, and perhaps less easy to accept. It is surely arguable, however, that we cannot afford to leave children without guidance in their leisure reading, an activity which plays so important a part in the shaping of their tastes, and thereby influences profoundly the quality of the cultural life of our society. And, if this is so, we need to understand how a child progresses in his leisure reading, by what gradations the reading tastes of the young child are finally transformed into the mature tastes of the full-grown human being.

The broad outlines of this metamorphosis are plain enough. In his passage from infancy to adulthood, the reader exchanges childish books, which deal in simple language and often under a guise of fantasy or allegory with a child's problems of adjustment to home, family and

friends, for adult books dealing in more difficult language and in realistic terms with man's concern with the great problems of life, death, love, pain and immortality. As reading tastes mature, progress may be regarded as taking place on three different levels: in language in themes, and in treatment. In the first place, as his reading skills improve, as he grows in the ability to grasp complex ideas, the reader chooses books of increasing difficulty, turning from simply written picture books to longer books employing relatively complicated language. Secondly, as he grows, his interests turn to increasingly adult themes, drawn from an ever-widening range of human experience, and involving progressively older characters. Finally, the element of fantasy so prominent in the books preferred in early childhood gives way to a much more realistic portrayal of character and situation: tales of toys and fairies are ultimately discarded in favour of stories about characters easily recognised as human.

What follows is in part an attempt to trace in detail the evolution of children's reading tastes in the course of their primary school lives. It is a record of the successive changes in language, themes and treatment that overtake the books which they prefer at different stages in their growth, such as will provide a yardstick, it is hoped, by which to judge whether a child's reading is keeping pace with his development, and to assess whether a given book is suited to a given reader.

More is required, however, than the mere record and description of the various books which children choose to read. Individuals vary widely in their preferences; each child is unique in the

combination of needs - intellectual, emotional and imaginative - which his reading seeks to satisfy. For this reason, it is not enough to know the books; we need to know the reader also, the personal characteristics and environmental influences which have combined to make the story of his development as a reader different from that of every other child. The reader's mental calibre and educational level are obviously important factors: on them will depend the degree of language difficulty with which the child can cope in books; it is likely, too, that the brighter and better educated the child, the more mature will be the themes and treatment which interest him. Sex differences cannot be ignored: they will be reflected, one expects, not so much in language as in themes and treatment. The part played by the home in forming reading tastes, while plainly of the greatest importance, is more difficult to assess. The nature of its influence is probably related to some extent to educational level and the economic status of the parents, and may be roughly gauged from the father's occupation. The son of an unskilled worker, one might guess, is likely to admire different heroes from those who would appeal to the son of a professional man, and in other ways to reflect in his reading the different ideals and values he has acquired from his experience. Another aspect of the reader's home environment can be expected to influence his taste in books: the nature of the personal relationships he enjoys within the family are vital to his entire emotional development and therefore, at least indirectly, to the nature of the demands he makes on books. It is likely, for example, that the child who has brothers and sisters will

have not only less time for reading, but less need for the companionship of books.

Pursuing these hypotheses, we shall try to assess the effects upon the growth of reading tastes of sex, mental ability, educational attainment, parental occupation and family circumstances. This involves comparing, in respect of language, themes and treatment, the books enjoyed by contrasting groups of children. To give one instance, books read by boys and girls of high educational achievement are compared with those read by children of relatively low attainment, in an effort to determine the degree to which maturity in reading tastes is related to school performance.

Children's tastes are reflected in the nature of their choices, in the quality of the books they read; their habits, on the other hand, are manifested in the quantity. And the same factors which determine tastes play a part in the formation of reading habits. A great deal of effort on the part of teachers goes into the task of inculcating reading skills; fully as important is the task of nurturing the disposition to make regular use of them, the task, that is, of fostering the reading habit. Yet the Crowther Report provides an alarming indication of the extent to which our efforts in this direction fall short of success, especially among the boys who leave our secondary modern schools.¹ It is of more than academic interest therefore to understand exactly how

1. Central Advisory Council for Education - England: "Fifteen to Eighteen", Vol. II, page 98. H.M.S.O. 1959.

the reading habit is acquired, who they are who resist it, and what conditions help its growth. Individuals vary as widely in the volume of their reading as in the quality, and it is a further aim of this enquiry to record these variations and, if possible, to explain them.

It is not claimed that the data here presented have been subjected to more than an elementary statistical analysis. The main purpose of more rigorous procedures would be to determine whether the findings are of general applicability, but, since there is no assurance that the population upon which it is based is in any way typical or representative of a wider one, it could be misleading to apply to such 'local' data statistical techniques designed to discover whether the conclusions to which they point have a more general validity. There is another reason yet why such methods are inapplicable: many of them depend upon the calculation of means and standard deviations from the mean; unfortunately, however, much of the evidence we have to offer is not amenable to this kind of treatment, and for this reason the calculation of correlations, for example between volume of reading and measured intelligence, proves quite impossible.

This, then is the record of the number and the kinds of books read by primary school children at different ages and of different sex, intelligence, educational attainment and social background. It is hoped that limited though it is, both geographically and statistically, it will shed light upon the wider field of children's reading, and above all help us to lay the foundations of a more effective approach to the task of guiding children in the full and proper use of books.

CHAPTER I

Investigating Children's Reading

So numerous have been the studies in recent years of reading in all its aspects that one is at some pains to find warrant for adding to their number. However, reference to bibliographies of the subject¹ reveals that the topic is by no means exhausted. Not unexpectedly, the majority of investigations have been carried out in the United States. There the necessity for teaching foreign-born immigrants to read has lent urgency to research into reading ability, and, because in American schools and colleges much is done to give students systematic guidance in their leisure reading, studies of reading habits have also seemed to be of practical value. Even so, in America as elsewhere, much more attention has been paid to investigations of reading ability than of reading interests.

British investigations of the latter kind have been especially rare, and these for the most part have been concerned with the reading activities of adolescents and adults. What is perhaps the most notable of the studies carried out in Britain, that of Jenkinson (1940), deals with boys and girls from twelve to fifteen years of age; those of Brearley (1949), McLaren (1950), and Carsley (1957) are among the few which are concerned exclusively with younger readers, while Dunlop (1950)

1. Vide: Traxler, 1940, 1943, 1955.
Inglis, 1948.
Vernon, 1960.

covers the ages from seven to seventeen years, Mullett (1951) from eleven to fifteen, and McDonald (1953) from eleven to fourteen.

Comparatively little, then, is known about the amount and quality of the leisure reading done by primary school children in this country, and it was felt that there is still scope for a study of children's reading activities from the time when they are first capable of independent reading at about the age of six, until the age of twelve, the point of junction with the bulk of the work that has already been done.

The method most commonly employed for collecting information about children's reading has been that of the questionnaire or record completed by the readers themselves. In some cases, this has taken the form of a journal of their daily reading over a period of perhaps a month, compiled by the children under the supervision of teachers. It has the merit of permitting all forms of reading, newspapers, comics, as well as books, to be considered, and it enables individual readers to be identified. It is however open to objections. Children are notoriously prone to try to reveal themselves in a favourable light. In the present enquiry, for instance, some children falsely claimed to be members of the library, while others claimed to have borrowed books which on investigation proved not to be part of its stock. For this and other obvious reasons, the method cannot with confidence be employed with very young children, and even with older children its reliability is questionable. The picture of adolescents' reading which Jenkinson, for instance, draws from their own accounts is far more flattering than others based on more objective information.

Free from criticism in this respect is the Child Readership Survey carried out by the British Research Bureau and Market Information Services for the Hulton Press in 1951. From statistics of the sales of children's books, the authors were able to draw conclusions about children's interests and the relative popularity of various kinds of books and certain writers. The defect of the method is, of course, that it provides no information about the readers themselves and therefore sheds no light on individual differences in reading habits.

A variant upon this procedure employs records, not of sales, but of issues of books to children from public libraries. Library surveys such as that of West Ham have usually adopted this method, again without providing much information about the children themselves. Dunlop (1950-) overcomes this by following up her survey of the books issued to children over one week from a Glasgow library with interviews of one hundred randomly selected children among those visiting the library. Though her chief concern was to find whether there was a significant divergence between the books available and those selected, or whether the books supplied were in the main ones which children enjoy, she was able to some extent to reveal how reading tastes vary with age, sex, education and social background.

This method of approach has obvious merits. It is true, of course, that it leaves out of account all reading other than of books borrowed from the library, but even this is not altogether a disadvantage. It is far easier to obtain an accurate record of what children borrow from the public library than to verify what they claim to have read from

other sources. Moreover, some children are more fortunate than others in the private supply of books available to them, and the fact that one child reads more or better books than another must often be due to different opportunities rather than to different interests. On the other hand, insofar as the library is equally accessible to all, the fact that one child makes more use of it than another is a fairly reliable indication of his greater interest in reading. Another, even greater, advantage lies in the fact that at the public library the number and variety of books available are so great that each reader can exercise an unfettered choice. When a child selects one book in preference to more than a thousand others, we are justified in assuming that his choice reflects his personal tastes. When, on the other hand, a high proportion of children claim to have read Dickens, let us say, we may infer that Dickens is available in most schools and many homes, but are not justified in assuming that children would continue to read Dickens in preference to other books which happen to be less easily accessible.

For these reasons it was decided to base this enquiry upon the books which children borrow from the public library. The one selected, Llandudno Public Library, serves a population estimated in June 1958 at 16,910, of whom 34 per cent make use of it to borrow books. It has a highly attractive Junior Department which some children join even before the age of three, and which others continue to use beyond the age of thirteen at which they can be admitted to the Adult section. They are entitled to take out one book daily, making their choice

from more than four thousand books displayed on the shelves and some thousands more available upon request. Obviously, then, this is the richest source of books available to the children of the area, but at the same time it is not the only source, or perhaps the most accessible. Some children will rely solely upon books found at home or school, lent by friends or received as gifts. For many, such sources will in any case be meagre and, at least for the more avid readers among them, quite inadequate. Even so, there will be children, avid readers among them, who never visit the library, but who find books sufficient for their needs elsewhere, while even the most assiduous users of the Public Library almost certainly read other books as well. So far as individuals are concerned, it would be a mistake to assume that because one child does not visit the library, he or she is not interested in reading, or that because another borrows more books, he or she is necessarily the greater reader. Nevertheless, in general the use made of the children's library may fairly be taken as an indication of the degree of interest children show in reading, and, even more accurately, as a reflection of their tastes in books.

The frequency with which a child will visit the Public Library depends to some extent upon its nearness. Llandudno Public Library is centrally situated in the town, but to minimise the effects of distance the investigation was confined to those children who were resident within a radius of one mile of the Library and who also attended one of the five primary and two secondary schools in the same area. It was limited also to children who on May 1st, 1958, were more than six and less than thirteen years of age, a total of 1,055 children.

Over a period of one year, from September 1st, 1957 to August 31st, 1958, a careful record was kept at the Public Library of every book borrowed by each of these children, each title being entered in the member's record as it was issued. Every effort was made to ensure that the record included only those books which had in fact been read by the child. On returning a book to the Library, the borrower was asked if it had been read and how much it was enjoyed. The possibility remained of a member's ticket being used by another child. Once in each term, therefore, each member was asked to check the list of books issued in his or her name in the previous weeks, and to indicate those which he or she had not read.

Of the 1,055 children within the scope of the enquiry, 555 made use of the Library in the course of the year. Part of our purpose was to discover how these were distributed by age and sex, to find what proportion of boys and girls of different ages borrowed from the Library, and to what extent, and thus to chart the growth in prevalence and intensity of the reading habit among children from year to year of their primary school lives.

Between them, they borrowed in the year about eleven thousand books. A list of the titles, apart from being unwieldy, would be uninformative to most adults, since the majority of them proved to be recent publications, intended strictly for children, and for the most part enjoying only a fleeting popularity. While fashions in authors and in titles change fairly rapidly, however, the basic themes which

interest children are less mutable. In order to convey a picture of the way in which children's tastes change and develop as they grow, an attempt was made to classify according to their content the books which children borrowed at each age.

Any such attempt to classify books is inevitably crude. Even the distinction between fiction and non-fiction is far from clear-cut in many cases, while between Historical stories and Adventure stories, School stories and Mystery stories, Family stories and Careers novels, there are large numbers which might just as easily be ranked on one side as the other. For that reason, an attempt has been made to analyse more closely the content of these books, to record the kind of setting in which the story is located, the age and sex of the main protagonists, and the type of activity in which they are engaged, in the expectation that these will vary consistently according to the age and sex of the readers.

Moreover, it seems clear, the books which children choose as they grow older, will tend to become more difficult. In order to verify and illustrate this, note has been taken of the format, the number of pages, the proportion of illustration, the size of type and the difficulty of language of every book issued, with the exception of those borrowed only once, and on each of these counts the norm or average calculated for readers of each age-group. These external aspects of the book are clearly important to the child, and play a great part in determining his choice, since he must inevitably be deterred if a book, however attractive its title or apparent theme, appears too big, has too many pages, too few pictures, too small a

print and too difficult a style for him to enjoy.

Fortunately it is a fairly easy matter to count pages and pictures, measure format and print, and assess the difficulty of language. For these there are objective standards of a kind which do not exist for measuring the degree of realism of a book. Yet, we believe, one essential change that takes place in children's reading tastes as they grow is the gradual abandonment of make-believe and the progressive acceptance of a greater degree of realism in the books they read. This reflects itself chiefly in the portrayal of characters. Whereas toys, puppets and fairies predominate in those chosen by the very young, human beings endowed with ordinary human qualities people the books enjoyed by adults. In the intervening years, readers pass through the stage of preferring stories about characters who in external appearance are completely human but who possess attributes or engage in activities not ordinarily found in real life. If to the first stage we may apply the term Fantasy, and to the last that of Realism, this intermediate stage we may call that of Romance.

Each of the books issued to these children has therefore been classified according to the nature of its characters as Fantasy, Romance or Realism, and calculations have been made of the proportions of each among the books issued to readers at different ages. Laborious though the process may appear, it is one which enables us to approach what is perhaps the most fascinating question of all those which can be raised about children's reading:

what is the relationship between the imaginary experiences they derive from books and the real experiences of life. And this, in turn, leads to the further question of why it is they read at all.

In order to shed light upon this second question, an attempt has been made to find out in what ways children who make use of the Library differ from those who do not. This aspect of the enquiry entailed the investigation of the intelligence, academic background, the social and family circumstances of readers and non-readers. This proved more than could be done for every child in the area, and it was decided that only those who were in their last year in the primary or the first year in the secondary schools would be considered. For each of these children, more than three hundred in number, information was collected by means of tests and questionnaires as to educational attainment, intelligence, parent's occupation and size of family. The relationship between each of these factors and children's reading habits and tastes was considered in turn. Children of high intelligence have been compared with those of low intelligence, in order to discover whether the former are more prone than the latter to make use of the Public Library, and whether the books they generally borrow tend to differ significantly in language, themes and treatment. In the same way, the academically able have been compared with the weaker scholars, those from manual with those from non-manual workers' homes, those from large with those from small families.

Membership of the Library is freely available to all; all the books in it are equally accessible to every child. If, therefore, children differ from one another in the extent to which they use the Library, and in the nature of the books they borrow, these differences may fairly be said to reflect different attitudes to reading. This is not true of all their reading; the books, newspapers and periodicals each child can read at home will differ from those available to every other child. It would be a mistake to compare the reading habits of different children unless all had equal opportunity to read. Too often, after reading accounts of investigations into children's reading, one is left with the uneasy feeling that one has learnt more about the reading matter they find available than about the kinds of books they are genuinely looking for. In the present study, the focus of attention is upon the child himself in the act of choosing for himself a book to read. The outcome, it is hoped, will be a clearer understanding of the factors which affect his choice, of the motives, conscious and unconscious, for which he reads, and of the bearing which his reading has upon his mental, emotional and imaginative life.

CHAPTER II

The Growth of the Reading Habit

We cannot but be aware of the extent to which the habit of reading pervades our lives today. It is a phenomenon we accept as natural, without surprise and even with cynicism. Yet to read, to derive meaning from graphic symbols, demands a complicated skill which does not come by instinct. Today, the average person by the age of twelve has of that skill enough to read with ease and pleasure, but for the majority of our people that skill has been within their reach only since the revolution in education in the last century. In the comparatively brief time that has since elapsed, the habit of reading has so spread that few indeed are untouched by it.

The Society of Young Publishers, in a small-scale survey carried out in London in 1959, found that 59 per cent of those they questioned were then in train of reading a book; 17 per cent only had not read a book within the previous month.¹ Similarly, among adolescents the Westhill survey² found that all but a small proportion, again 17 per cent or so, were well used to reading books. And among school-children, Jenkinson (1940) found that an even smaller number, perhaps five or six per cent, seemed not to read books in their leisure hours. There are some who can never read. By reason of mental disability or other

1. "The Bookseller". Jan. 16, 1960. Pp. 122-124.

2. Westhill Training College, 1950.

handicap, perhaps ten or fifteen per cent of the people of this country fail to acquire that level of skill which is necessary for adult reading. Remembering this, we are forced to recognise that virtually all in Britain who can read have to some degree contracted the habit of reading, whether it be of newspapers, periodicals, or books.

To take books alone, the number of titles published annually in Britain has in recent years exceeded twenty thousand. Public libraries play a vital part in their dissemination. Of the people interviewed in London, 34 per cent had borrowed the last book they read from a library, while 54 per cent had borrowed from a library at some time or another. In Llandudno, 34 per cent was again the proportion of the population that was found to have borrowed from the Public Library in 1959, and these took out an average of about forty books in the year,¹ while for the country as a whole the statistics published annually in the Library Association Record testify to the use made of our public libraries by the adult population.

The question that arises is how the habit grows. At what age is it acquired, and once acquired does it persist? There is good reason to believe that the thirty per cent or so of the population who continue to borrow from our public libraries in adult life form only a small proportion of those who have at some time in their lives been in the habit of doing so. The Crowther Report points out that

1. Llandudno Public Library: Librarian's Report for the year ending March 31st, 1959. p.19.

of the boys who receive their education in our grammar schools, 89 per cent are members of a library at some period while they are at school, but within two years of leaving school the proportion falls to 55 per cent. An even steeper decrease occurs among boys from secondary modern schools, from 68 to 16 per cent.¹ A study of eleven thousand children over eight years of age, carried out by East Ham Public Libraries in 1934 found that 68 per cent of them were members of a library, 45 per cent of them being considered active members. Among children aged from seven to eleven, Brearley (1949) found 34 per cent of them to be library members, while Mullett (1951) found that among grammar school boys aged eleven to fourteen years, 36 out of 70 (51 per cent) used the public library. He cites other evidence to suggest that at about this period in their lives, a fairly sharp decline occurs in the use boys make of the public library. All this suggests that library membership, gradually increasing throughout childhood, reaches its peak at some point during early adolescence and thereafter undergoes a decline until among adults it is confined to the thirty per cent or so who form the hard core of committed library readers. If this is the case, the library habit follows much the same pattern of development as has been traced in the growth of leisure reading habits in general. Terman and Lima (1931), for example, state that interest in reading approaches a climax of intensity at the age of twelve and afterwards declines in the years of high school education,² though neither Jenkinson (1947) nor Scott (1947)

1. Central Council for Education: "15 to 18", Vol. II, p.98.
H.M.S.O. 1959.

2. Terman and Lima: 1931. P. 38.

finds evidence of any great loss of interest in reading before the age of fifteen.

From the evidence of the library reading of the children of Llandudno, it seems that Terman and Lima are probably correct in locating the peak in late childhood or early adolescence. Indeed, if we were to consider only the numbers of children who join the library, we should conclude that among the twelve-year-olds the popularity of the library is already on the wane. On the other hand, the average number of books taken out by readers is highest among the twelve-year-olds. We need to consider separately, therefore, the membership and the rate of borrowing as two somewhat contradictory indices of the popularity of reading among children.

Defining a member as a child who took out from the Library at least one book in the course of the year, we find that of the 1,055 children within the purview of the enquiry, 555 (52%) became members during the year. The proportion of each age-group who joined rose steadily from 30 per cent of the six-year-olds to 67 per cent at the age of ten, thereafter falling to 61 per cent at eleven, and to 56 per cent at the age of twelve.

There are a number of explanations for this curve. The very youngest members were found to visit the Library in the charge of adults, the slightly older ones in the company of bigger children, brothers, sisters, or friends. In their early years, therefore, children are dependent on the good will of their elders for the opportunity to borrow books. There may well be some who, despite

their interest in reading, fail to find an older person willing to accompany them to the library, and for that reason the figures of library membership may not give a very faithful indication of the extent of interest in reading among the very young. Older primary school children, however, usually appear at the Library with groups of companions of their own age. For them the visit is a social occasion; they acquire from one another the habit of attending the Library and, to a large extent, their tastes in books. The important point is, however, that at this age visiting the Library is a group activity which no doubt attracts a number whose interest in reading is not in itself enough to take them there alone, or who would not be able to attend if they were obliged to rely upon their elders for company to go. Among those who join the Library at this period of their lives, there are undoubtedly some whose main interest is not in books but in the companionship of others, and who will in later years abandon the reading of library books for other activities which continue to offer opportunities of mixing with others. Those who continue to patronise the Library at the age of eleven or twelve tend to go alone or with a single friend to borrow books. In all probability it is these who become the dedicated readers, whose interest in books is strong enough for them to forego the companionship of others for the solitary joys of reading.

There are other reasons for the steady increase in attendance at the Public Library in the years of primary school life. It is to be expected that as with growth more and more children acquire the ability

to read, more and more will seek opportunities to exercise their skill and to reap its benefits. Membership of the Library rises most steeply between the ages of nine and ten, when the rudimentary reading skills have been mastered by the great majority. Unquestionably, one of the satisfactions which children derive from reading is that which comes from the exercise of their skill. We have often seen children, having learned, let us say, to skip, thereafter skipping endlessly, repetitively, and apparently with no other purpose than to skip. This pleasure in an activity for its own sake is also part of the attraction reading has for children. The content of the book, the interest of the subject-matter, are often of only secondary importance; children will often read with evident enjoyment what is apparently quite unsuitable material, simply to develop or display their virtuosity as readers. The point will emerge more clearly when we come to consider the vocabulary and sentence structure of the books these children customarily read, but it is worth saying here that the sense of achievement which a child derives from having read a book to the very end is no small part of the total satisfaction he experiences in reading. In any reading programme intended for young children it is important therefore that there be an adequate provision of simple books which the reader can complete almost effortlessly.

Even in the early stages, of course, children read for other purposes than the exercise of their skill. They very soon become aware that their achievement in school work hinges to a large degree upon their reading. This may in part account for the fact that so

many of these children join the Library in their last year in primary schools before examination for selection for secondary education. It is certainly the case that after this point a number of them lose interest in the Library, and it is probably true of some of these that they read not so much for pleasure as in the hope that it will bring success at school. There is reason to believe, as will appear, that such children rarely become devoted readers.

It is not to be taken that children generally read for such conscious and utilitarian purposes. Rarely are they able to give any reason for reading other than that they enjoy it; they are largely unaware of the basic needs they seek to satisfy through books. But in a sense the pleasure which they feel is incidental, an overt sign of the fact that such needs are being met. And it is because these needs are most urgent in the period of development prior to adolescence that interest in reading is most widespread at this stage and afterwards begins to wane.

Apart from his physical needs, perhaps the deepest need to which the growing child is subject is for experience, for opportunities to realise his full potential as a human being. He is prey to curiosity about the world of things and people outside himself; he is dimly aware of capacities within himself for feeling, thought and action, which demand outlet and expression. These are part of the primal urge to grow, change and develop, which constantly impels him to seek out new experiences, to push against the boundaries of

the world with which he is familiar in order to give himself more elbow-room. This ceaseless effort to extend his field of action may be observed even in the very young. No sooner is the infant fully accustomed to the safety of his mother's arms than the growing power of his muscles prompts him to kick free of her embrace and make trial of his legs on the kitchen floor. From the kitchen he ventures to the garden, from the garden into the street, each fresh field offering new sensations, demanding new adjustments and evoking new skills, until finally it is out-grown. In exploring the external world, he discovers himself; each new experience evokes from him a new response, and he grows not only in understanding of the outside world, but in awareness of the resources of his own nature.

Reading ministers to the child's need for ever wider, deeper and more varied experience. The more restricted the reader feels his opportunities for real experiences to be, the more urgent is his need for the vicarious experience offered him in books. Until the age of ten as they grow older, more and more of these children have time and energy to spare for reading library books. Evidently the activities which have hitherto occupied them are no longer capable of absorbing their whole interest and attention; visits to the Library and the reading of library books appear to increasing numbers of children interesting ways of passing time. It is not simply that they have more time to spare for reading however; behind their desire for new ways of spending their leisure one may sense their impatience with the restrictions imposed on them in every-day life,

with the obstacles and prohibitions which hinder their search for novel experiences. Reading enables them to overcome these barriers, to be anyone, to go anywhere and do anything they please. Ten-year-olds especially appear to chafe against the restrictions of their day-to-day existence and to need the opportunity reading affords for the imaginative exercise of their growing physical, emotional and intellectual powers.

Fewer eleven-year-olds borrow from the Library. For some of them, no doubt, once the selection examination is over, the main reason for reading library books no longer exists, while for others the fresh calls made on them now that they are in secondary schools leave them little time for reading. The new subjects they now meet and the homework they are now expected to do bring new interests into their lives and leave them not only with less time but with less need for library books. At the same time, with the ending of their primary school lives, many of them gain a greater measure of freedom than they have hitherto enjoyed; they move in a new environment, meet new people and engage in new pursuits, in all ways leading lives fuller and more varied than before. In these circumstances, fewer of them feel the need for the substitute experience afforded them by books.

Fewer still of the twelve-year-olds make use of the Library. Most children by this time are fluent readers, and the urge to practise and improve their skill is on the wane; the selection examination, which was an additional incentive to reading, is now

past; the larger world of the secondary school pupil and the adolescent is now open to all. In later years, no doubt, they will again come to think their lives irksomely restricted, and again turn to reading in order to widen their horizons, but in all likelihood the numbers using the Library continue to decline for some time beyond the age of twelve, since at 56 per cent the proportion of members among the twelve-year-olds is still far higher than among adults.

Though membership of the Library declines after the age of ten, there is no decrease in the number of books borrowed by those who remain members. On the contrary, the average rate of borrowing rises continuously from 14.5 books per member at the age of six to 26.5 per member at the age of twelve. We have no means of knowing whether this increase continues, but it perhaps is relevant that the average issue to adult members of the Library is approximately forty books a year. What seems to happen between the age of ten or so and adulthood is that many of those who have used the Library cease to do so, while those who retain their membership increase their amount of reading. A winnowing process seems to take place in which the less enthusiastic readers gradually fall away, leaving finally only a relatively small core of inveterate readers, comprising perhaps a third of the adult population.

That this is in fact what happens between the end of childhood and maturity is entirely conjectural. It is supported, however, by the fact that at some time in the intervening period a decline

FIGURE 1.
LIBRARY MEMBERSHIP AT EACH AGE
Boys and Girls combined .

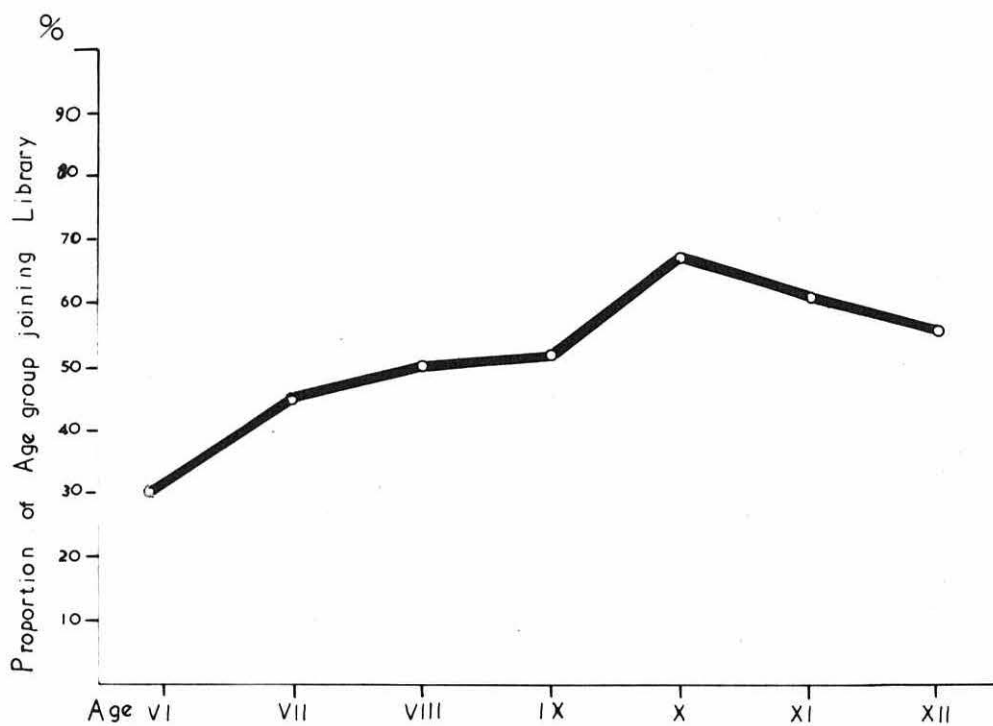
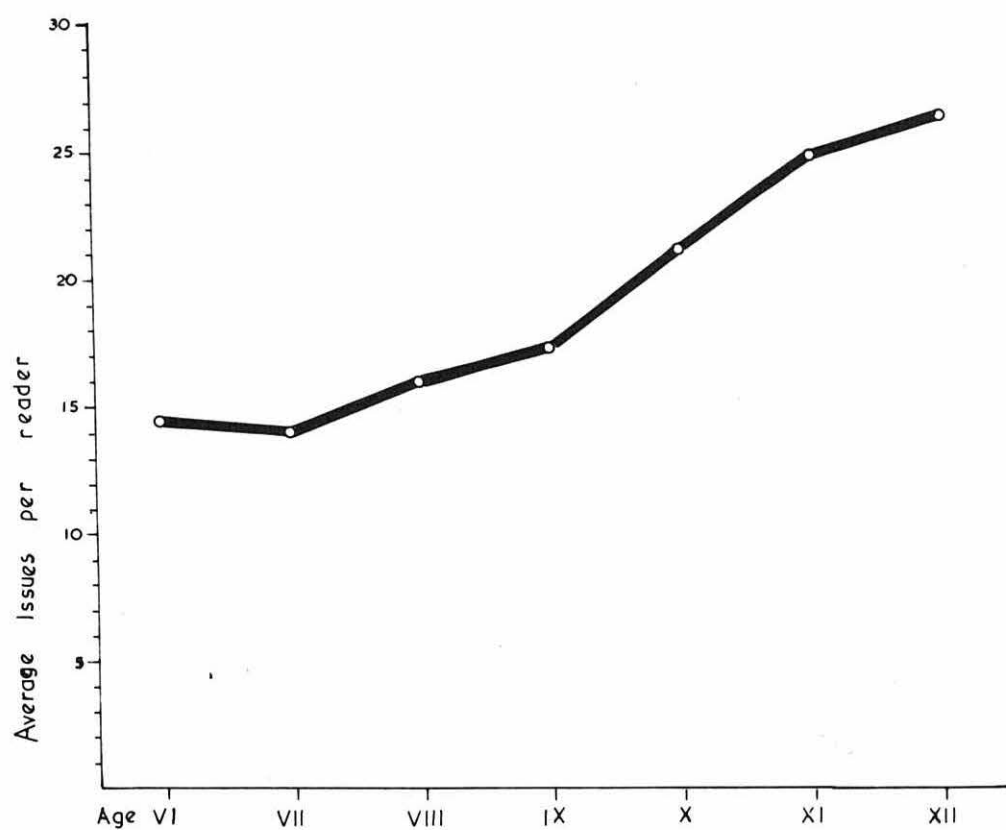


FIGURE 2.
RATE OF BORROWING AT EACH AGE
Boys and girls combined.



takes place in the numbers making use of the Library, accompanied by a steep rise in the rate of borrowing of those who do so. Moreover, there is evidence that this is already happening between the ages of ten and twelve. A comparison of Figures 1 and 2 shows that in this period membership of the Library declines while the rate of borrowing continues to rise. Prior to this the steady rise in membership from year to year is accompanied by a similar rise in the rate of borrowing. It is to be expected that, as in the years of their primary school lives their reading skills improve, children will read more. A number of investigations have shown that a certain correlation exists between reading achievement and the number of books read.¹ This is only to be expected, since the habit of reading brings about an improvement of reading ability, and that improvement in turn makes possible more rapid and extensive reading. The correlation, however, is only partial; the number of books a child may read does not depend entirely upon the level of his reading ability. A child of very low reading ability may nevertheless read large numbers of simple picture-books which demand virtually no reading skill. In such a case reading ability would be expected to correlate more closely with the length and difficulty of the books selected than with their number.

Even so, the steady rise in the average rate of borrowing on the part of Library members which goes on during the years of primary

1. The correlations reported appear to range from ± 0.30 (Lipscomb, 1931, p.61) to $+0.44$ (Wollner, 1949, p.78).

education is no doubt largely due to the improvement in these years of their ability to read. In all probability also, it is the weaker readers who beyond the age of ten begin to fall away, in many cases perhaps because their reading skill has not progressed sufficiently to enable them to read the kind of books which are of interest to them at this age. The continuing rise in the average rate of borrowing on the part of surviving members is mainly due, no doubt, to their higher average ability, but other factors are probably involved. Even the weakest readers are not entirely debarred from using the Library. Their choices may be restricted to the simpler books, but these exist in adequate numbers and in fair variety. Children of low ability can, and though in diminishing numbers do, make considerable use of the Library even beyond the age of ten or eleven, while others of higher ability fall away. The decisive factor in such cases is not the level of reading ability but the degree of interest in books. The two are obviously related but by no means inseparable.

At the age of ten more children are attracted to the Library and more books are borrowed on an average than at any previous age. Among those drawn to the Library at this time, however, there are many whose appetite for books, keen though in some cases it may be, fails to survive the following year or two. Many youngsters at about this time appear to experience a short-lived and superficial interest in reading, less perhaps as a

means of exploring new spheres of thought and feeling, less as a means of real growth than as an expedient for relieving boredom, and especially that boredom to which restrictions on their physical freedom give rise. Many, that is to say, join the Library at about the age of ten for want of anything better to do, and of these the majority discontinue their membership as soon as other pursuits become available. The new interests and activities which become possible to boys and girls on leaving the primary school inevitably distract a number of them from their reading. Among those who resist these fresh attractions and who maintain their membership of the Library beyond the age of ten or eleven will be those for whom reading meets deep-seated and enduring needs.

There are two phases, therefore, in the propagation of the reading habit among children. The first extends from infancy until about the age of ten, a period in which the majority of children at some time or other give reading a trial, and many of them use the Library to do so. There follows a period in which some turn increasingly to other activities which they find more satisfying, while others develop a growing appetite for books. The child's final attitude to reading is largely shaped in the years immediately following his tenth. This is not to say that an enduring taste for books may not be implanted at an earlier age, but simply that it is impossible to predict whether even the most voracious reader in childhood will continue to read in adolescence. The eleventh and twelfth years are momentous ones in the life of every child. New

and difficult adjustments are called for to unfamiliar schools, to fresh privileges and responsibilities, to unsuspected needs and impulses within themselves. However profitable or satisfying reading may have appeared to the child in earlier years, it will not seem to serve any useful purpose in the present unless he manages to find books which are in some way relevant to the complex personal adjustments which he has to make. An essential task of the teacher at this stage is to help the individual to find such books. The foundations of an abiding interest in reading are laid if at the time when the individual is seeking new, more mature and more satisfying modes of thinking, feeling and acting, books make an effective contribution to the search.

Nothing can be done, however, unless the child is prepared to give reading a trial. Though in this country every child is given at school some opportunity to become acquainted with books, not all children have the same facilities, encouragement or disposition to give their leisure-time to reading. It is widely held that boys differ from girls in their attitude to books. Many studies carried out in various parts of Britain, in New Zealand and the United States among subjects of different ages lend support to the conclusion reached by Lehman and Witty (1928) that at every age from eight and a half to twenty-two girls express more interest in reading than do boys. The bulk of the evidence goes to show, moreover, that girls surpass boys in the amount of leisure-reading that they actually do. Opinion is not quite unanimous on this

FIGURE 3 .
LIBRARY MEMBERSHIP AT EACH AGE
Boys and Girls compared

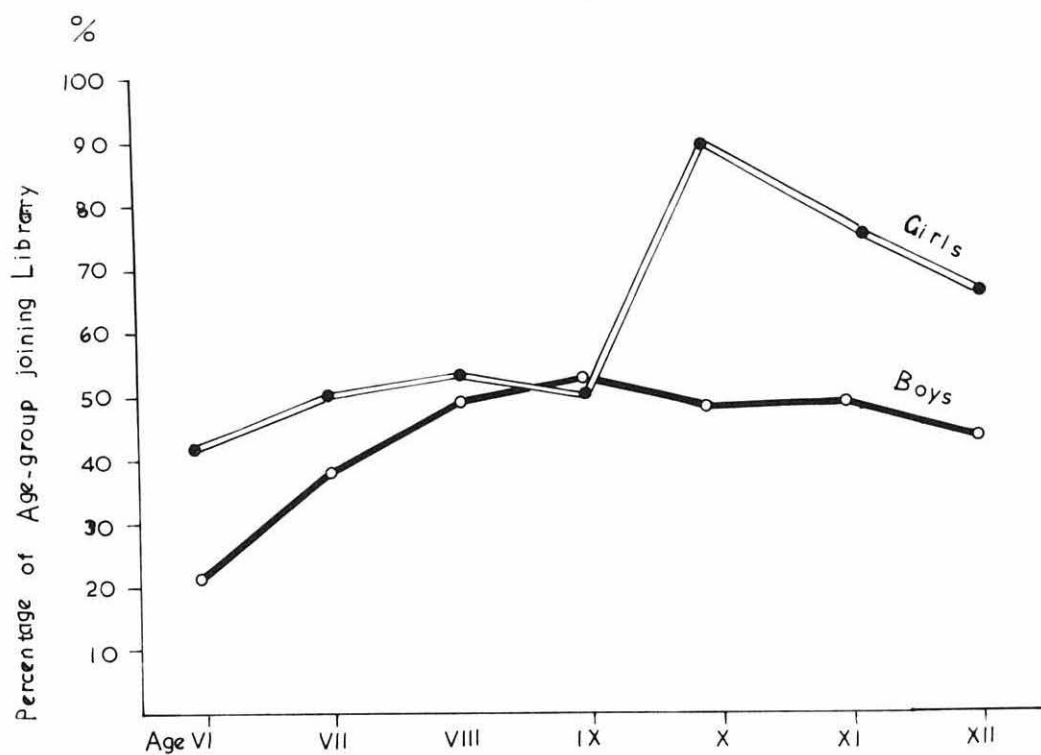
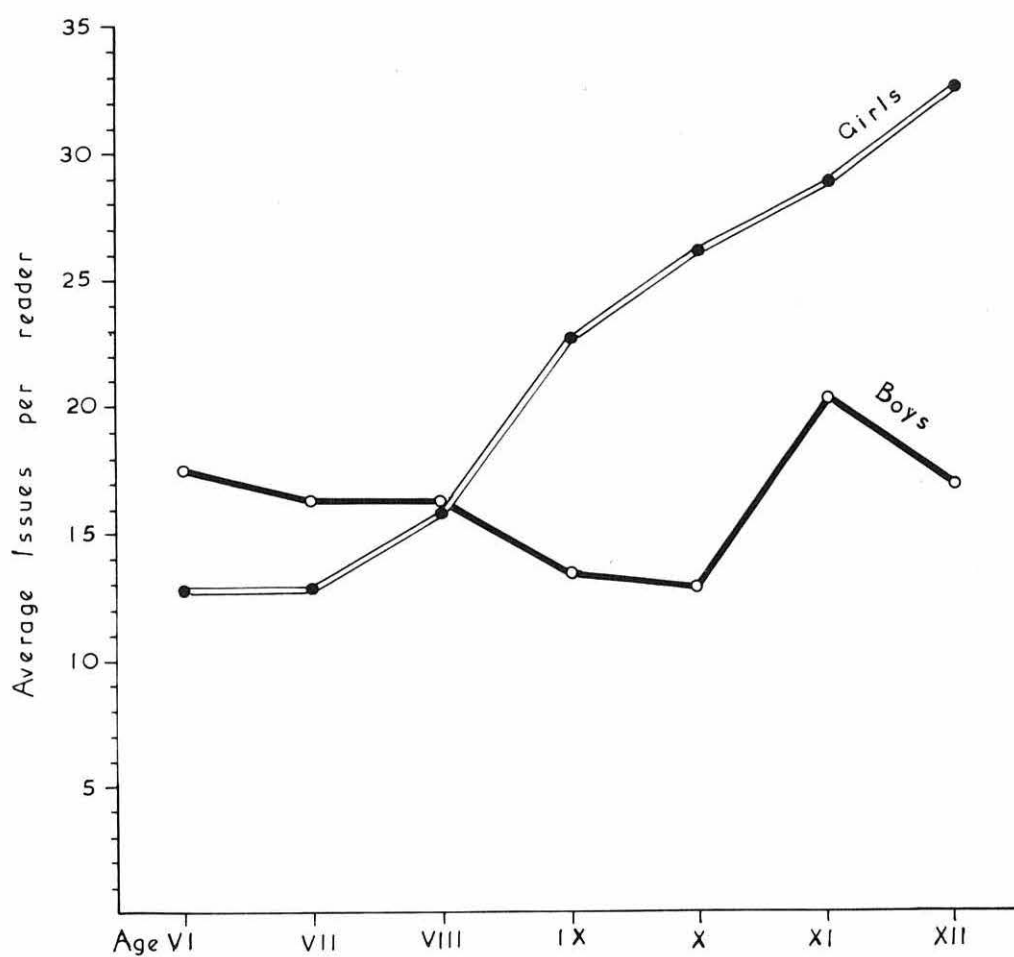


FIGURE 4 .
RATE OF BORROWING AT EACH AGE
Boys and Girls compared



point, however. Lehman and Witty themselves consider that though boys express less favourable attitudes to reading, they do not in fact read appreciably less than girls. Wollner (1949), finding that among seventh, eighth and ninth grade children, the boys and girls alike borrowed an average of 16.6 books a year from the school library, agrees with the view put forward by Lehman and Witty that American boys tend to disclaim any great interest in reading because cultural influences dictate that reading be considered a feminine pursuit. This view is not unknown in Britain in certain classes of society, and it may go some way to explain the evidence adduced by every British investigator in this field, that girls more readily confess to enjoying reading, and in fact read more, than boys.

Of the 555 children who were members of Llandudno Public Library, 43 per cent were boys, 57 per cent were girls. This agrees fairly closely with evidence found elsewhere, and notably in Glasgow, where of the children between seven and seventeen years of age who were members of the Public Library, 64 per cent proved to be girls.¹

From Figure 3 it will be seen that only among the nine-year-olds does the percentage of boys joining the Library exceed that of the girls. This is the only time at which more than half the boys make use of the Library, whereas at least one half of all the girls are members after the age of six, and among the ten-year-olds the proportion rises to its peak of 88 per cent. This evidence supports the

1. Dunlop, Doris C., 1949. Page 95.

majority opinion that more girls than boys give their leisure-time to reading. There are some discrepancies between this and the evidence of the Sheffield Public Libraries' Survey of 1938 that the number of readers rises (more slowly in the case of girls than boys) from the age of seven to ten, which is the peak for both sexes, with a preponderance of girls at all ages.¹ There is disagreement as to what happens between the ages of nine and ten, when from the present data it appears membership rises startlingly among the girls but begins to fall away among the boys. It may be that purely local factors are involved. It is possible, for instance, that the provision of books at Llandudno, excellently designed to meet the needs of boys and girls alike up to the age of nine and of the girls beyond that age, is rather less successful in catering for the boys of ten. This can easily happen since, as will appear later, the tastes of boys and girls are very similar in early childhood, but the boys tend to develop specifically masculine interests at about the age of nine, whereas essentially feminine tastes in books are not evinced by the girls until about the age of ten.

There are, of course, other possibilities. It would be surprising if in the twenty years which separate the Sheffield enquiry and the present one children's reading habits had not undergone some change. Dunlop, noting that among Glasgow children in

1. Quoted by Dunlop. Page 87.

1947 membership of the Library was highest among the twelve- and thirteen-year-olds, speculates as to whether the war and the consequent decline in standards of reading achievement among children might account for the discrepancy between her findings and those of the Sheffield survey of 1938.¹ Standards of reading are now thought to have recovered from the set-back brought on by the war, and it may be because of this that the peak age observed in 1958 is closer to that found in 1938 than in 1947.

This explanation is based on the assumption, for which there is a good deal of evidence, that voluntary reading is related to reading achievement. There are grounds for believing that girls are generally superior to boys in reading ability, and it is reasonable to see a connection between this and the fact that more girls than boys adopt reading as a pastime. We have no means as yet of knowing whether, or to what extent, these differences are traceable to innate differences between the sexes; it is certain, however, that cultural factors have some influence. It is the case, as has been mentioned, that reading tends to be regarded as an effeminate pursuit. More than that, the tradition still persists, though it may be on the wane, of permitting to boys more freedom than to girls to spend their leisure outside the home. Among Birmingham's adolescents, for example, it was found that the girls spent twice as many evenings at home as did the boys,² and that in consequence far more boys than girls, whether

1. Dunlop, p. 88.

2. Westhill Training College: 1950. "80,000 Adolescents".

from lack of inclination or of time, gave no part of their spare time to reading books.

Obviously reading has to compete with other activities for a share of children's time, but such rival attractions are relatively few in early life. Indeed, while both boys and girls are confined, when not at school, almost entirely to the home, the latter may find it easier to spend their time in other ways than reading. It is much more natural for the girl than for the boy to share the mother's household tasks, cleaning, mending, cooking, nursing. The boy has fewer opportunities of joining in his father's activities, and less incentive to remain indoors. Many, of course, while they are young are obliged by their parents to spend their evenings in the house, and for these reading may be the only attractive occupation available. This is probably why the boys who join the Library before the age of eight are on the whole more assiduous readers than the girls. It will be seen from Figure 4 that the average rate of borrowing by the boys who join the Library declines slightly between six and eight, then more perceptibly until the age of ten. Membership of the Library among the boys tends to increase until the age of nine, and it may be that the later recruits are on the whole less enthusiastic readers than the earlier ones, but it is significant that rising membership among the girls brings about no diminution in the rate of borrowing. The explanation seems to be that the boys as they grow older, and especially between eight and ten, are free to pursue out-door activities which are

more attractive to them than reading, while the girls, still largely confined to the home but increasingly dissatisfied with the occupations in which they have hitherto engaged, turn more and more to reading. It is evident that the girls gain their freedom somewhat later than the boys, and it is not until after the age of ten that the numbers joining the Library decline, and even then the rate of borrowing on the part of those who remain continues to rise.

These fluctuations in membership and in rate of borrowing serve as forcible reminders that for children reading is at best a substitute for practical experience and personal involvement. Children therefore tend to read most in those periods in their lives when they find themselves shut off from fresh experiences. Emancipation from constant parental surveillance, coming earlier for the boys than for the girls, entry into secondary schools, and escape from childhood into adolescence, each of these brings with it a whole field of new activities and experiences, but in the period of mounting expectancy and frustration which precedes each one, it happens either that more children have recourse to reading or that those who already have the habit read more avidly.

CHAPTER III

Fiction and Non-fiction

More than eleven thousand books were issued from the Library in the course of the year to the children concerned in this enquiry, and in the overwhelming majority of cases the readers who had borrowed them claimed to have enjoyed them. Asked to express on a five-point scale approval or disapproval of each book they had taken out, they gave the highest rating, meaning that they had thoroughly enjoyed the book and would willingly read it again, to no less than 44 per cent of their selections; of less than 7 per cent did they express positive dislike. The books they take home from the Library are obviously suited to their tastes, and it should therefore be possible by examining the books issued to gain some knowledge of what children are looking for in books, and of the way in which their interests alter as they grow. Such information is clearly relevant to the task of catering for children's needs and promoting healthy reading.

There have been many attempts to discover what children like to read. It is one thing, however, to amass an enormous amount of data about books which children have read or say they have enjoyed, but it is quite another matter to convey this information to others as meaningfully as possible. One method of ordering the evidence so that it reveals its significance is to ask the readers to rank the

books or authors they have read in order of preference, and from the resulting votes to compile a list of those in the top ten or twelve places in the poll. Apart from the difficulty of deciding whether to give the same weight to the opinion of a child who has read only one book as to that of one who has read a hundred, there is the further drawback that the field is so large that even the most popular titles and authors attract only a very small proportion of the total votes cast. This also applies when the list is based, not on expressed preference, but on the number of people who can be taken to have read each book or author. Nearly two thousand different titles were issued by the Library at least once in the year; since the total number of issues was a little over eleven thousand, each book was read on an average by fewer than six readers, and these not necessarily of the same age. Even those which were in very great demand were rarely borrowed more than twenty-five or thirty times, an inconsiderable proportion of the total number of issues, and it might be quite misleading to attach a great deal of significance to variations which must inevitably be extremely small. To know that books by Hans Andersen were borrowed on twenty-three and those of the Grimm brothers on twenty-two occasions, allows us neither to draw conclusions about the eleven thousand other books they borrowed, nor to say with any certainty that the former holds more appeal for children than the latter.

Jenkinson is among those who have adopted the procedure of compiling lists of popular books and authors based on children's declared preferences. One example may serve to illustrate some of

the limitations of this method. Among the authors popular among twelve-year-old Senior school boys,¹ Dickens heads the list with 38 votes, while John Buchan comes seventh with five; between them come R.L. Stevenson, Defoe, Thomas Hughes with 'Tom Brown's Schooldays', Kingsley, and Rider Haggard. Quite apart from the fact that Defoe, for instance, gains third place in the list with only twelve votes, teachers and librarians are struck by the apparent popularity of classic writers among relatively ungifted children. So totally at variance is this with their observations and experience that they may be forgiven for thinking that the children have set out deliberately to mislead. This may, of course, be true, but in any case the fact that a title or an author is well-known is itself sufficient to ensure that a relatively large number of children will have read his books, and if, as not infrequently it happens, a famous writer writes good books, many of those who read them will enjoy them, even though they habitually read much less exalted stuff. In other words, this list tells us more about the quality of Dickens as a writer than about children's tastes in books. Even so, it is as well that we should be reminded that writers such as Dickens have an immeasurably stronger appeal for their readers, few though they be, than the hundred run-of-the-mill writers who capture the great majority.

Other investigators have produced lists of the authors or books which have attracted the largest numbers of readers, and have used

1. Jenkinson (1940) p. 71.

three main sources of information for this purpose. Carsley (1957) is one who employs the children's own records of the books they have read in the previous month; the Child Readership Survey (1951) carried out by the British Research Bureau and Market Information Services is based on the sales of children's books; Scanlan (1948) produces a list of the one hundred books most frequently taken from the shelves of the public libraries of St. Paul in the United States in the course of a year. These lists are alike - and in this they contrast sharply with that of Jenkinson - in that books of recent publication are predominant. The majority of those listed by Scanlan, for example, proved to have been published later than 1940, and are therefore unlikely to be familiar to adults, certainly outside the country of their origin. Apart from what can be gleaned from the titles, these lists provide very little insight into the kinds of books that children like to read, nor can there be any assurance that their authors will continue to be popular for more than a very short time. With the great increase since the second world war in the number of children's books being published, many new writers have enjoyed a brief period of popularity, while the accepted children's classics have fallen into neglect.

Though individual books and authors do not often remain long in vogue, the underlying tastes and interests of children, it may be supposed, are relatively constant.¹ The majority of investigators

1. Sward and Harris (1952), for example, find that the predominant themes in children's magazines changed very little between 1873 and 1933.

have therefore attempted some system of classifying the books they find to be popular with children. The problem in devising such a system is to decide upon the criteria to be adopted in allocating books to different classes. Two books may be alike in one respect and dissimilar in another. From one standpoint, therefore, they may be regarded as belonging to the same class, but from another standpoint as belonging to different classes. This does not matter, as long as each book is judged from the same standpoint, or if the categories used are such that no book can belong to more than one. In practice, however, no-one, so far as we have been able to discover, has devised a completely consistent system of classifying children's books. Categories such as Fairy Stories, Historical Stories, School Stories, Adventure Stories, which have been adopted by nearly every investigator, are obviously extremely imprecise. To what category should be allocated, for example, a book which has a school setting, an historical background and an adventurous plot? Very often, it is the best of children's books which defy classification. All too many others are written to a ready-made formula and are therefore easily allocated, but it is difficult to find an objective criterion for dealing with such hybrids as 'Fourth Form Detectives' or 'School in Space'.

While there is bound to be ambiguity in cases of this sort, it seemed nevertheless worth trying to assign every book which had been borrowed at least once to a class which underlined its salient features. In any case, no other course seems practicable, since

of the two thousand or so books among which these children made their choices no more than sixty¹ are likely to be well-known to adult readers, and these accounted for less than two per cent of the total number of issues. This makes it obvious, incidentally, that the children of today, at least up to the age of twelve, are drawn far more to the works of contemporary writers than to the classics.² The system of classification adopted differs only in detail and not in principle from systems employed by others in this field. The books are divided into twelve main groups, based for the most part on differences in plot. Thus a book is deemed to be a School Story, not by virtue of its location, but because it deals with characters involved in school relationships and school activities. Were it to deal with the activities of characters engaged in detecting crime, it would be classed as a Mystery story, notwithstanding its setting. There are three exceptions to this: Puppet stories, Fairy stories and Animal stories are distinguished not by plot but by the kind of characters they deal with. From the standpoint of plot, a story involving toys, fairies or animals might be regarded as a Family Story, an Adventure Story, a School Story or any other kind of story. In practice, however, because it is

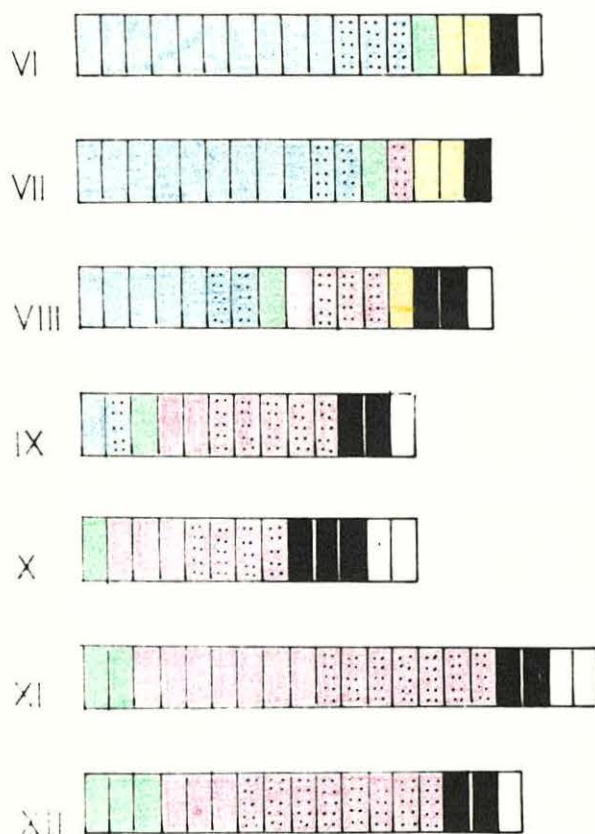
1. See Appendix, Table 4.

2. A survey by Bethnal Green Public Library (1946) suggests that between 1939 and 1946 writers of light fiction such as Enid Blyton have gained ground with children at the expense of authors such as Dickens, Lewis Carroll and Mark Twain.

TABLE 5. ANALYSIS OF ISSUES

BOYS

Age



KEY :

Fantasy

Puppet

Fairy

Animal

Juvenile
Realism

Gang

School

Pony

Romance

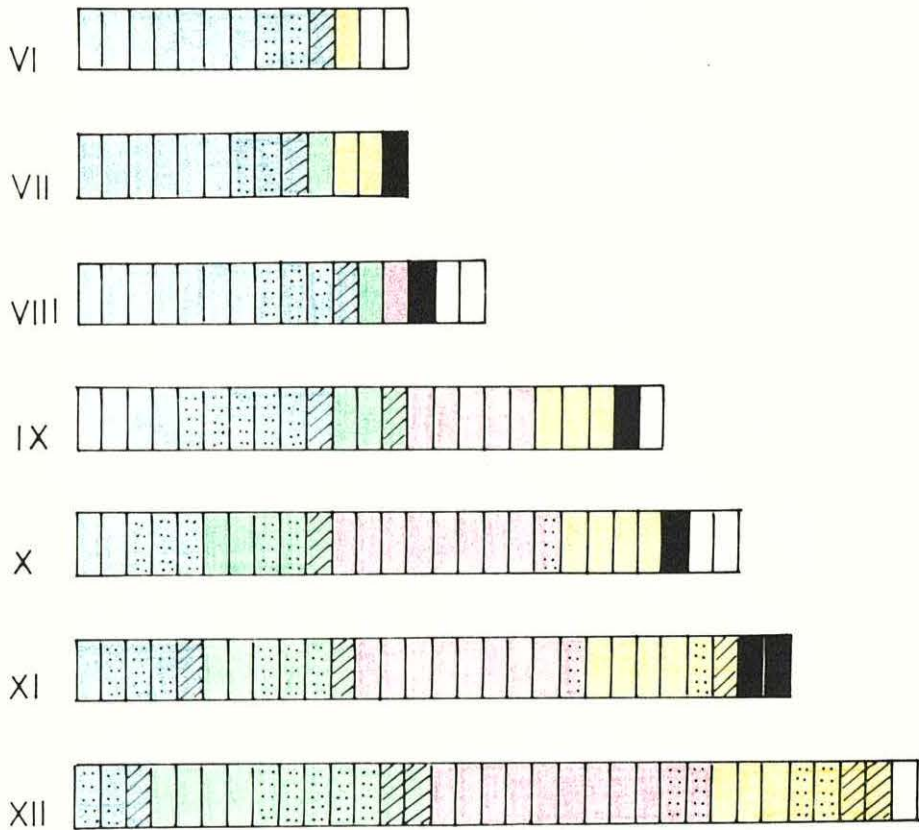
Mystery

Adventure

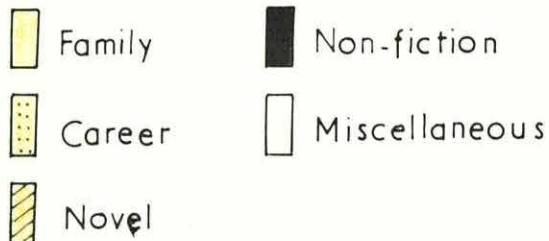
ACCORDING TO TYPES

GIRLS*

Age



Adult Realism



the nature of the characters rather than of the plot which attracts the children who read these kinds of book, it would be quite misleading to classify them otherwise. In general, therefore, in assigning a book to a particular class, an attempt is made to view it from the standpoint of the child trying to decide whether it is the kind of book he likes to read, and to stress that aspect to which the child considering that book is likely to pay most attention.

Figure 5¹ illustrates the way in which the books selected by children at different ages are distributed among the various classes. To take as an illustration the girls' reading, it is clear that as the average number of books borrowed rises from 13 at the age of six to 33 at the age of twelve, so the variety of books selected enormously increases; the average of 33 books issued to the twelve-year-olds is made up of 2 Fairy stories, 1 Animal, 4 Gang, 5 School, 2 Pony, 9 Mystery, 2 Adventure, 2 Careers stories and 2 Adolescent Novels, and another 1 which might belong to any of these classes.

Before going on to consider the extent to which each type of books appeals to boys and girls at different ages, it might be as well to look for a moment at the overall pattern of development that is revealed. It seems, for instance, that sex differences in reading interests are very small before the age of eight. It is true that

1. See also Appendix, Tables 3a and 3b.

the taste for Adventure stories, which may be regarded as essentially masculine, emerges very early, but otherwise the books taken out by the boys of six and seven are very much the same as those borrowed by the girls. By the age of nine, the differences are quite considerable. The Adventure Stories so attractive to the boys are utterly neglected by the girls, while the Puppet and Fairy stories, which still form a considerable proportion of those read by the girls, have almost entirely fallen out of favour with the boys. By the age of ten, the main interest which the boys share with the girls is in the Mystery story, though in catering for the tastes of a mixed class of children of this age, it might be possible to find Gang stories, Adventure stories, and works of non-fiction which appeal to both sexes.

What is perhaps most striking is the lack of variety in the reading of the boys compared with that of the girls. One has the strong impression that other than in the fields of the Adventure story and the Mystery, there is a serious shortage of books suitable for boys, and that this accounts in part for the comparative lack of interest in reading on the part of the boys beyond the age of nine. Whether it is that the girls are more fortunate in this respect, or that they make better use of the books available to them, it is quite evident that the boys' reading is much more limited in its range. It would seem that when they are not reading for information, they read almost exclusively for what might be termed escapist reasons, and leave wide reaches of experience unexplored, at least in books. Reading that has so little bearing on the lives they live cannot but seem ultimately profitless

even to themselves, and it is small wonder that they are so much less interested in books than are the girls. It must be apparent that if boys are to develop an enduring interest in books and a true appreciation of their worth, they need to be aware, from an early age, that books can enormously extend their own experience and illuminate every aspect of their lives. And this means that above all their reading should be varied.

At first sight there seems to be little variety in the reading of the average child of six. Apart from a small minority, the books issued to boys and girls of this age are either Puppet or Fairy stories. In fact, however, books belonging to these two classes are alike only in that they are peopled by humanised animals and toys - dolls, bunnies, engines, in the one case, or gnomes, elves and fairies in the other. In their themes, however, they can be as varied as life itself; these puppet figures are shown meeting the vicissitudes of school life, family life, love, marriage, parenthood, danger, even war, and through them children can enjoy a range of vicarious experience almost as wide as that offered by adult literature. The essential difference between this and adult literature is that the characters, while possessing human attributes, wear some obviously fictitious guise, as if to reassure their readers of their unreality.

Stories in which animals play human roles are at least as old as Aesop's Fables, popular in this country since Caxton's edition of 1484, and still among the Toy stories borrowed by these children from the library. More light-hearted fables of this kind, written

specially for children, were first produced in the eighteenth century by L'Estrange, Croxall and Dodsley, but it is the illustrated tales of Beatrix Potter, first published in the last century, which are today the best-known examples of this genre.¹ Still highly popular, as is shown by the fact that they were issued more than fifty times, they have attracted a number of modern imitators, of whom Noel Barr, Jane Pilgrim, and A.J. MacGregor in collaboration with W. Perring, are the most prolific.

In the Picture Book form associated with the name of Beatrix Potter, these tales are chiefly read by children up to the age of seven, but in the more demanding form popularised in 1880 by Joel Chandler Harris, American author of the Uncle Remus tales, Aesopian fables are still among the books borrowed by the boys at nine, and by the girls at eleven years of age. Harris himself claims five readers only, Kenneth Grahame four, but their more modern successors, Alison Uttley, author of the stories of Sam Pig, and Rodney Bennett, creator of the mouse heroine, Little Miss Pink, have a considerable following.

The origin of story-books in which the leading roles are borne by toys is not easy to trace, but it is certainly no later than the appearance in this country, in Mary Howitt's translation of 1846, of

1. Darton (1932) gives an absorbing account of the history of children's books in England. On this, on Meigs (1956), Smith, L.H. (1953) and Eyre (1952), I have relied heavily for the historical details presented in this chapter.

Hans Andersen's "Wonderful Stories for Children", which included the tale of the Little Tin Soldier. The golliwog first appeared in print in 1895, in a story by Florence and Bertha Upton, and is still familiar to these children as a minor character in Enid Blyton's Noddy books, while Teddy Bear, who made his début shortly after, is chiefly known through the stories of Mrs H.C. Cradock. A.A. Milne is perhaps the most distinguished writer of this kind of book, but Winnie the Pooh has yielded in the esteem of these children to Muffin the Mule in the stories of Ann Hogarth and Annette Mills, and to Muriel Levy's Wonk.

In children's books of recent times human attributes have been extended to cars, lorries, tractors, trains, ships, helicopters, steam-shovels and sky-scrappers. They are commonly produced as picture books in which print has only a minor part, and in this form they are widely read up to the age of seven, but more difficult books such as those of Elizabeth Chapman about Marmaduke the Lorry are read by boys up to the age of nine and by girls even later. Not unnaturally, perhaps, the boys tend to prefer stories about mechanical toys of this kind to the dolls and toy animals favoured by the girls, but Puppet stories of one sort or another form more than a half of the books borrowed at the age of six by boys and girls alike, declining by the age of nine to 6 per cent among the boys, 17 per cent among the girls.

Already, at the age of six, there are signs of a growing interest in characters more recognisably human than those of Puppet

stories. Nursery rhymes make their first appearance among books borrowed at this age. Some at least of the jingles and catches still popular in this form are thought originally to have lampooned real political figures and events. The earliest collection known, "Tom Thumb's Pretty Song Book", edited by N. Lovechild and published by M. Cooper, appeared in 1774, while another, "Mother Goose's Melody", is believed to have been compiled by Goldsmith for John Newbery, the first publisher of children's books. The same rhymes, in modern coloured editions, still attract a number of these children, but it is the Fairy story that stands next to the Puppet story in popularity at this age. This, too, has a long history. Perrault's "Histoires ou Contes du temps passé, avec des Moralitez", published in 1698, refurbished for French courtly taste the stories told by peasants to their children. "Sleeping Beauty", "Little Red Riding Hood", "Puss in Boots" and "Cinderella" were speedily translated into English, but at this stage they were not mainly intended for children. The "Kindermarchen" of the brothers Grimm appeared in German between 1812 and 1824, and were introduced to England shortly after by Ruskin as "Household Tales", translated by Edgar Taylor and illustrated by Cruikshank, while Andersen's "Wonderful Stories for Children" appeared in 1846.

All these stories, in modern versions closely following the originals, are still widely read, as are the "Fairy Books" compiled by Andrew Lang in the last century, and also appear, very much simplified, in picture-book editions intended for the very young.

Even so, tales of this kind, with their origins in folk-lore, form only a part of the Fairy stories read by children. Many others trace their lineage through Kipling's "Rewards and Fairies" (1926) and "Puck of Pook's Hill" (1906), Lewis Carroll's "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" (1865), Kingsley's "Water Babies" (1863) back to William Roscoe's "The Butterfly's Ball" (1807). These are works of original invention, though the gnomes, elves and fairies with which they are peopled form part of a native tradition obscurely linked with the Arthurian legend. It was known to Chaucer's Wife of Bath, Shakespeare drew upon it for his "Midsummer Night's Dream", and vestiges of it still remain in local legends, both in England and in Wales. The modern elf and gnome, as they appear, for example, in Enid Blyton's stories, though they belong to the same twilit, magical world, have nothing of the elemental quality of Puck, Oberon and Titania; instead, they are shy, fragile and laughter-loving, idealised children possessing magical power. There is a world of difference, too, between these and the supernatural beings who people the stories of C.S. Lewis and of J.R.R. Tolkien, and between these and Mary Norton's Borrowers or Barbara Euphan Todd's Worzel Gummidge. Almost the only thing they have in common is the element of magic, of the supernatural, and this is the sole criterion distinguishing books which have been classed as Fairy Stories. These range, therefore, from simple picture-books to the very difficult, and include works as widely different as those of Perrault, Enid Blyton and Tolkien.

Roughly one-sixth of all the books borrowed by the boys of six belong to this class, but they decline very rapidly in popularity until they are virtually ignored by boys aged ten. In contrast, the girls' interest in stories of this kind is at its peak among the nine-year-olds and remains quite strong even among those of twelve. It must be remembered, of course, that the picture-book versions chosen by the six-year-olds gradually give way to more demanding books, and at the same time the innocuous fairy story of the kind written by Enid Blyton tends to be pushed out of favour among the older children by more sophisticated stories such as those of Perrault and Andrew Lang, and stories of magical events in a contemporary setting by authors such as Barbara Euphan Todd and P.L. Travers.

In the Puppet story and the Fairy story, the characters, however disguised, bear some obvious sign of their essential humanity; by their physical appearance, their dress, their habits or their speech, they invite their readers to regard them as human beings. In the Animal story, on the other hand, the characters around whom the action revolves wear no disguise; they are animals - horses, dolphins, otters, salmon, birds - appearing as themselves, and claiming no special affinity with human beings. In some cases, they are imagined as being capable of speech, and their authors do not always avoid, or even try to avoid, endowing them with human thoughts and feelings; but externally their appearance, their activities and their way of life are those of animals. Although their authors do not insist on any resemblances between these animals and human beings, children

reading, let us say, the story of a pony stolen from its owner and ill-treated by strangers before finally being restored, cannot but draw parallels from what they know of human life, or from their own experience. While in one sense the Animal story is more realistic than the Puppet or the Fairy story, in another sense it is, like them, an allegory in which human beings appear in disguise. The difference is, of course, that in the Animal story it is the reader, not the author, who humanises the characters.

Essentially an Animal story is the fictional biography, or sometimes the autobiography, of an animal, and is distinguishable from other kinds of books in which animals appear in that the animal itself is at the centre of the plot, rather than any human beings with whom it may be related. In some stories, the fictional element is exiguous, while in others fantasy is given full rein. At the one extreme Gladys Taylor's "The Swallows and Selina" is virtually a book of nature study, while at the other there is little to distinguish the animals in Dodie Smith's "The Hundred and One Dalmations" from those of Beatrix Potter. The typical Animal story avoids both extremes, and is more akin to Anna Sewell's "Black Beauty", Jack London's "Call of the Wild", or Kipling's "Thy Servant, a Dog". All these were occasionally borrowed, but modern stories such as Thomas C. Hinkle's "Tan" and D. Broome's "Circus Pony", were more popular.

The girls begin to borrow books of this kind at the age of six, and continue to read an average of one a year throughout this period except at the age of ten. Oddly enough, the boys very rarely borrow

stories of this sort; the older ones show some interest in stories such as J. O'Brien's "Silver Chief", an adventurous tale not unlike "The Call of the Wild", but few of them are greatly attracted to the more sentimental Animal stories, similar to "Black Beauty", which interest the girls. This neatly illustrates the major difference between the boys and girls as readers: the former are attracted mainly by stories of sensational events, the latter by accounts of personal relationships.

The three types of story hitherto considered, the Puppet, the Fairy and, to a lesser degree, the Animal story, belong essentially to the Infant school period or to early childhood. They continue to be read, particularly by the girls, up to the age of twelve, but in decreasing numbers. They are gradually ousted by other kinds of books which are more closely concerned with the interests and activities of children in the pre-pubertal stage. The first of these kinds to make its appearance is the Gang story, which enjoys a modest popularity among the six-year-old boys and which thereafter is borrowed in ever increasing numbers by both boys and girls at least until the age of twelve. Almost alone among all the kinds of books which children read, it attracts boys and girls alike at every age, and for that reason deserves close attention. It is important for another reason also: an awakening interest in stories of this kind marks the beginning of a new and more realistic phase in the development of the child as a reader.

An atmosphere of reality is perhaps the most distinctive feature

of stories belonging to this class. The 'milieu' is the world of the peer group, in which adults, when not excluded entirely, occupy only very minor roles, and the values, rules and sanctions that prevail derive, not from the adult world, but from the gang. To that extent, these stories give fanciful expression to the growing child's rebellion against adult domination, but within the limits of the juvenile world which they describe, the characters are not unlikelike, nor are their activities far-fetched. Many are tales of youthful mischief, of which those of Richmal Crompton are still perhaps the best known and most popular, but in others the children are animated not so much by rebelliousness, as by the need for independence and responsibility. In Kathleen Fidler's "St Jonathan's in the Country", for example, a number of children exert themselves on behalf of a hospital for orphans established in the Lancashire countryside, while in Monica Edwards' "Storm Ahead", when floods overtake a small fishing village nearby, the boys and girls take part beside their elders in the work of rescue and relief. In nearly all these stories there is an element of adventure, though not such as to strain belief, but the emphasis is less upon the physical exploits than on personal and social relationships within the group, or between the group and the community. Also belonging to this class are the works of Arthur Ransome and his many successors. Ransome himself began to write in 1930, and his tales of the exploits of groups of children calling themselves the Swallows and the Amazons set a fashion in children's books which has endured to this day. Though the

popularity of Ransome's stories is perhaps now on the wane, other writers, George E. Haley and Gilbert Hackforth-Jones notable among them, have employed his device of setting his characters afloat on rivers, lakes and coastal waters to enjoy completely credible and legitimate adventures.

Akin to the Gang story is the School story. Like the former, it is concerned with activities, relationships and values which belong essentially to a world of children, and this world it portrays in reasonably life-like and credible terms. Children's mischief is the theme of many of the School stories popular today, but the earliest of the species, "Tom Brown's Schooldays" by Thomas Hughes (1856) and Frederic W. Farrar's "Eric, or Little by Little; a Tale of Roslyn School" (1858) were written in a different, more moralising vein. Nearer in spirit to the school-boys of modern fiction are the characters of the stories written for "The Boys' Own Paper" by Talbot Baines Reed between 1879 and 1893, or of Kipling's "Stalky and Co.", published in 1899. The Jennings books of Anthony Buckeridge belong to this tradition, but in these the main characters are rather younger than was usual in earlier School stories, and they seem to be designed to appeal to rather younger readers.

School stories, in any case, have so far fallen out of favour among the boys as to represent little more than one per cent of all their borrowings. Among the girls, however, they are held in high esteem. The taste for stories of this kind appears rather suddenly towards the end of primary school life, and grows rapidly

in the next few years. Even so, the School story for girls appears to be evolving in directions parallel to those followed earlier by School books for boys. The works of Angela Brazil, Margaret Biggs and Nancy Breary, which broadly speaking are counter-parts of those of Talbot Baines Reed, Kipling and Frank Richards, seem to be yielding to those of Enid Blyton, which, like those of Anthony Buckeridge, are concerned with younger characters and are designed for younger readers than was formerly the case. Other writers make no pretence of giving a credible account of school life; the schools themselves are often situated in Switzerland or Skye, or other even more romantic places, their regime is often unorthodox in the extreme, and their pupils include a surprising number of heiresses, princesses and film-stars in disguise. Many stories of this sort, though they have a school background, are not essentially concerned with school activities or with the responses children make to the school situation, and are therefore more fitly classified as Mystery or Adventure stories. The hall-mark of the School story, as of the Gang story, is its concern with fairly life-like children in fairly credible situations.

The Gang Story and the School Story portray children engaged in activities proper to children and involved in relationships with others of their kind. The Pony Story is like both in these respects. The most popular among the stories of this type, those of Christine, Diana and Josephine Pullein-Thompson, describe the pleasures and excitement of the hunt and the gymkhana, but implicit in them is the suggestion that the ownership of a pony and the ability to ride are keys to friendship with other children. The standard of horsemanship is the

criterion by which these children judge and are judged, and in striving to be more proficient, they make themselves acceptable to their fellows. Even in these stories, however, the horse is usually more than a mere symbol of status in the peer group; a strong sense of intimacy is sometimes shown to exist between animal and owner, and the child is depicted as finding in its relations with an animal the love and affection which it has not found in its relationships with human beings. Pet animals appear, of course, in children's stories of all kinds, but in Pony stories, and in others similar to them in spirit but involving dogs or other animals, the relationship between the animal and the child form the central theme. In some cases, the child and the animal are beset by similar problems and find their way together to similar solutions. Both pony and child may have become suspicious and unfriendly as a result of the ill-treatment they have suffered; the trust that grows up between them enables them to win success at the horse-show, thus ensuring for the animal a good home, and for the child the affection of parents and friends.

In many of these Pony stories, therefore, an emotional or psychological theme underlies, and runs parallel to, the superficial account of horses and horsemanship. Nor surprisingly, then, the boys show little interest in these stories, but the girls are attracted to them from about the age of nine. Certain of these stories appeal particularly to the twelve-year-olds, because the psychological sub-plot concerns the emotional

development of an adolescent girl. In D.V.S. Jackson's "Bluebird", for example, the heroine overcomes her fears of the horse, and learns to accept risk and danger as the price to be paid for the happiness that horsemanship can bring. At the same time this experience makes her prepared to give up the security of childhood and to conquer her fear of the young man who offers her his love. In "The Silver Quest" by Elizabeth Bleecker Meigs, the horse is again given a symbolic value. Chela, approaching adolescence on her grand-father's Mexican ranch, befriends a wild silver stallion, last of a breed introduced by a national hero as a symbol of the freedom for which he had fought in vain. She mends the horse's broken leg, and, resisting the temptation to make the horse her faithful slave, sets it at liberty. In recognition of her unpossessive love, the horse returns to her once before escaping to the wilds, and the girl is made aware of love as the means of freedom and fulfilment.

Only in the superficial appurtenances of the plot do these stories of Meigs or Jackson resemble the Pony stories of the Pullein-Thompsons, and an even wider gulf separates them from the School stories of Enid Blyton and the Gang stories of Arthur Ransome. Despite these differences and the inherent weakness they reveal in this and any other system of classifying books, School, Gang and Pony stories are alike in that they deal with the activities and preoccupations of youngsters not vastly different from their readers. In this they are distinguishable from books which have been classed as Mystery stories. These appeal to their readers, not because the characters they portray are subject to the same difficulties and

limitations as themselves, but because the characters, though children, enjoy experiences considerably more eventful and exciting than are conceivable in real life.

Catherine Sinclair's "Holiday House", which in 1863 recounted the exploits of a group of children left free to pursue their own devices, is in some respects the fore-runner of stories of this kind. It is notable for introducing into children's books the first of the tolerant grand-parents and jolly uncles who almost unfailingly appear in the Mystery stories of today. The essential ingredient in these stories, the investigating by children of suspicious adult behaviour, appears, probably for the first time in children's books, in Mark Twain's "Tom Sawyer" (1876), though the smugglers, spies and gipsies who are the villains of more recent books are usually less murderous than Injun Joe, and the children much more masters of the situation than are Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn. It is characteristic of these stories that, in spite of the dangers and difficulties which the children incur, the atmosphere is one of gaiety and enjoyment rather than of fear and anxiety. This emphasises the element of wish-fulfilment, of escapism, in stories of this type, an element which is especially noticeable in the "Famous Five" and "Secret Seven" stories of Enid Blyton, which are certainly the most widely read of all.

The enormous popularity enjoyed by these and other stories like them calls for explanation. Mystery stories make their first appearance in appreciable numbers among the borrowings of the eight-

year-olds, and thereafter are read in increasing numbers until the age of eleven, when their appeal for the boys, though not for the girls, begins to wane. At the peak of their popularity, they form roughly a third of all the books issued to the boys and girls alike. It is obvious therefore that these stories respond to needs which are extremely widespread among children of this age, and that an examination of these stories may yield clues as to what these needs may be. The most important perhaps is the need felt by the child to be accepted by his fellows. Recognising the importance of this as a motive for reading, Enid Blyton invites her readers to apply for membership of the "Secret Seven Society". Even without this invitation children certainly identify themselves with members of the gang, and Enid Blyton has made this easier by including in her gangs children of different ages and of either sex. These stories cater too for the child's need to be freed occasionally from parental supervision, and to assert his independence and self-reliance. It is obvious also that this concern with mysteries reflects the child's awareness that in real life there are mysteries from which he is excluded, as it seems to him, by a conspiracy of silence on the part of adults. And finally, the child approaching adolescence asserts his claim to be considered on terms of equality with adults, a claim seldom upheld in real life, but in these books, where the children invariably get the better of the adults, acknowledged in full.

The Adventure story meets many of the same psychological needs, but the books in this class differ from those of the Mystery in that the 'milieu' is more adult, the incidents more violent, and the atmosphere more tense. The distinctions between the two are often small, but the holiday atmosphere which almost invariably prevails in the Mystery story is quite different from the air of anxiety and tension which pervades the Adventure story. It is partly for this reason, no doubt, that they appeal more strongly to the boys than to the girls, and to older rather than to younger children, but it is also the case that they are almost all intended for the older boys, since girls seldom appear in these stories, and the central characters are nearly always youths or young men. Even so, from about the age of ten, the girls themselves borrow books belonging to this category, though only at the age of twelve does the average reach two books a year. In contrast, they form a substantial proportion of the books borrowed by the boys from the age of seven, while at the age of nine and upwards they are more widely read than any other kind of book.

Tales of heroism existed long before any written language was invented. In Europe, the 'chansons de geste' popular throughout the Middle Ages had their origin in the much older oral traditions that arose from historical events, and stories similar in origin, "Guy of Warwick", "Bevis of Hampton", "Havelock the Dane", "Robin Hood" and "King Arthur", were among the first to come from Caxton's press after 1484. Of these, the tales of Robin Hood and King Arthur still claim a number of readers, and to these have been added many other stories by historical novelists from Sir Walter Scott to Henry Treece.

While these authors have looked to the past for the source of their material, others have given their stories a contemporary setting, or, following the example of Jules Verne and H.G. Wells, have looked into the future for subjects for Adventure stories. The basic theme remains the same, however: the ultimate triumph, through physical force, of the good over the bad. At first sight, there are only superficial differences between R.L. Stevenson's "Treasure Island" and Percy F. Westerman's "The Lure of the Lagoon", or between Buchan's "Prester John" and W.E. Johns's "Biggles and the Black Raider"; almost the only innovation is in the introduction of modern settings and inventions. Naturally enough, children like their stories to appear up-to-date, but it is among readers of Adventure stories that the demand for novelty is most vociferous. As a result, writers of Adventure stories appear to be engaged in an unending struggle to keep abreast of the times. Eric Leyland, one of the most prolific authors of Adventure books for boys, has written of pirates and of Cowboys and Indians, but by far the most popular of his books are those dealing with a group of young men in modern times, equipped with automatics, fast cars and aeroplanes, and dedicated to the task of hunting to destruction criminals and saboteurs in all corners of the earth. W.E. Johns, whose stories of adventure in the air have been enormously popular since World War II, has in recent years launched his heroes into outer space.

While at first sight these changes appear purely external and superficial, in fact the Adventure story of today is profoundly

different in atmosphere and tone from the more reputable of its fore-runners. A comparison between "Treasure Island", for example, and almost any modern story of Space adventure, illustrates the point. The modern story, despite its bizarre and often horrific contents, rarely has on its readers the emotional impact of "Treasure Island". It is sensational without being truly moving; it may stretch the nerves, but does not stir the feelings. The reader of "Treasure Island" has no difficulty in recognising Jim Hawkins as a boy not unlike himself, and in seeing all the other characters, good and bad, as human beings of the kind he meets in daily life. The reactions of these characters to one another and to the situations in which they are involved are much the same as those which the reader has already observed in himself and in other people in parallel circumstances in real life. Because the fictitious characters and situations wear this air of familiarity, the reader responds to them 'in propria persona', so to speak. His feelings about them are his normal feelings, clarified, intensified, made more perceptive and articulate perhaps, but nevertheless compatible with his ordinary personal experience. Unlike Stevenson, the modern writer of Adventure stories tends in the search for constant novelty to stress the unfamiliar and outlandish; settings tend to become more and more fantastic, incidents more and more sensational, characters less and less human. The reader's personal experience therefore gives no clue to the kind of emotional response that is appropriate to the fictitious situation. Reading of Long John Silver's downfall, for example, he responds with feelings of the same order as those he experienced, let us say, on hearing that

the headmaster he disliked has had a serious accident, and he is confirmed in his reactions by the fact that he shares them with the hero, Jim Hawkins. His personal, human reactions are made to appear wildly inappropriate, however, in the face, let us say, of the destruction by lethal rays of a distant planet and all its monstrous inhabitants.

Many people have misgivings about the effects upon children of violence in comics, books, films and television programmes. Whether these fears are justified or not still remains uncertain, but in any case a clear distinction can be drawn between violence to which the reader is invited to respond in a fully human fashion - not only with excitement but with fear, not only with triumph but with pity - and that violence which is exploited solely for sensation, and which is intended to evoke a purely nervous, reflex reaction. The growing addiction of these boys to stories of Adventure is itself evidence of the fact that an appetite for thrills grows with what it feeds upon. Whether this is positively harmful in a moral sense may be open to doubt, but there can be little denying that the taste for Adventure stories tends to oust all interest in books better qualified to do what literature can supremely do: refine the sensibilities, educate the emotions, teach us to feel what it is like to be a human being.

Teachers in secondary schools generally agree that girls come to appreciate adult literature at an earlier age than do boys. Part of the explanation for this lies in the fact that, whereas boys are

largely addicted to Mystery and Adventure stories in their voluntary reading, girls are accustomed to read from early childhood stories which have an affinity with adult novels in that they are concerned with personal relationships and emotional problems, and that their treatment of these themes is designed to convey an impression of realism and authenticity. These are the characteristics of the Family stories, which are rarely read by the boys above the age of eight, but remain in favour with the girls at least until the age of twelve. These stories deal with the activities of individuals in the home, and their relationships with other members of the family. They range from Picture books telling of the children's party in the nursery, to long and moving accounts of loneliness and deprivation such as "Oliver Twist" and "Uncle Tom's Cabin". Although modern stories are rarely as harrowing as these, those which appeal to older children often have a vein of pathos. Joanna Spyri's "Heidi", telling of an orphan's efforts to melt the heart of her obdurate grand-father, is extremely popular, as is Ian Serrallier's "The Silver Sward", which tells of a family of children who make their way from war-time Poland to find their father and mother in Switzerland. Others, such as Enid Blyton's "The Queen Elizabeth Family" and Grace James's "John and Mary" stories, are much more light-hearted and appeal mainly to the younger girls.

Among the Family stories are a number of day-to-day accounts of children's lives in which the story element is reduced to a

minimum. Mrs Molesworth's "Carrots: just a little boy", published in 1876, is of this kind, but more popular today are fictional accounts of children living in foreign countries: Lois Lenski describes in "Judy's Journey" the life of the family of a migrant farm labourer in the United States; "Oolak's Brother" by Bud Helmericks deals with an Eskimo family, while Andrée Clair's "Moudaina" is the story of a negro boy in the Chad; most popular of all among these children is Laura Ingalls Wilder's semi-autobiographical account of life in a log cabin in Wisconsin entitled "Little House in Big Woods". In these, and to some degree in all Family stories, an attempt is made to present ordinary human beings, children especially, in domestic situations which, though sometimes unusual, are always natural and credible. Their main value for their readers lies in the fact that they portray people adapting themselves to circumstances and situations not totally unlike those with which they themselves are faced in daily life; they present patterns of behaviour which the readers themselves might fittingly adopt. In short, these stories manifestly set out to show their readers how human life is or can be lived, and this is clearly what their readers desire to learn.

The home obviously plays a more important part in the lives of girls than of boys, especially in the middle years of childhood, and this explains to some extent the lack of interest in Family stories among the boys. As children approach adolescence, however, they become increasingly preoccupied with the need to equip themselves to meet the demands of adult social life, to become independent of their parents and to associate on equal terms with adults in the world outside.

The Careers story, which caters quite specifically for young people at this stage in their development, is of very recent origin. Among the very first of its kind was Helen Dore Boylston's "Sue Barton, Student Nurse", which remains extremely popular and has the characteristics peculiar to all stories belonging to this class. It conveys, within a fictional framework, a certain amount of useful guidance to readers contemplating a particular career. Far more important, however, than the factual information it provides is the account it gives of the central character's emotional problems and personal relations. The adolescent is shown making difficult choices, facing disappointment and failure, enduring rivalry and deceit, and often finding love and marriage. In stories, at least, nursing is easily the most popular career, but teaching, librarianship, secretarial work, and countless others have been treated in stories of this kind. It is evident, however, that the chief interest of their readers is not in the careers themselves, or in the factual details, but in the personal and psychological elements in the story. As evidence of this it may be said that children who read stories of this kind rarely restrict their choices to those dealing with one or two careers, but read Careers stories of every sort.

Books of this kind have been written for boys, but even these attract at least as many readers among the girls as among the boys. The great majority are designed for girls, and within the age-range considered here it is the girls alone who read them in any quantity. They are first attracted to them at about the age of eleven and their interest grows stronger in the following year and probably persists

for some years beyond. This growth of interest in Careers stories provides a very clear example of the way in which children's reading tastes reflect their emotional and psychological development, and illustrates how their reading sometimes prepares children to meet their own problems of adjustment. The Careers story is especially well adapted to serve this purpose because it deals in every-day language with quite undistinguished characters in contemporary situations. Its treatment even of love and courtship is deliberately prosaic and matter-of-fact, and this is the secret of its appeal to readers approaching adolescence, for whom these themes already have in any case strong emotional implications. This common-sense approach, though it inevitably deprives the Careers story of any distinction as literature, is reassuring to the reader since it implies that the anxieties and difficulties he or she experiences are normal to adolescents, and in any case surmountable.

The matter-of-fact tone of the Careers story distinguishes it from what may be called the Adolescent Novel, of which Louisa M. Alcott's "Little Women" (1868) is an early and still popular example. Whereas the Careers story underlines the typicality of its characters and their situation, the Adolescent Novel lays more stress upon their singularity. The underlying theme in both is that of the adolescent's attempt to meet the demands of adult life, but the Adolescent Novel is less concerned with the practical than with the emotional, moral, or spiritual trials the individual undergoes. "Heidi grows up" and "Heidi's Children", written by Charles Tritten as sequels to Joanna Spyri's "Heidi", were often borrowed, as were L.M. Montgomery's

"Chronicles of Avonlea", "Anne of Green Gables", "Anne of Avonlea" and others, but the most popular of all were those of Mabel Esther Allan, in which tone and atmosphere are appreciably more modern. Apart from the relative youth of the central characters, there is no great difference between these and adult novels of sentiment or of manners, and in practice it was found convenient to consider some of the few adult novels which these children read, notably Jane Austen's "Pride and Prejudice" and Thackeray's "Vanity Fair", as belonging to this class.

Like the Careers story, the Adolescent Novel was borrowed almost exclusively by girls, rarely before the age of eleven but in increasing numbers at the age of twelve. Very few books of this kind appear to have been written with boys in view. The fact that in the majority the principal character is a female is itself enough to ensure that they will be read by very few boys, but even if this were not the case it is doubtful whether they would appeal strongly to them. It is sometimes said that girls achieve emotional maturity earlier than do boys. If such differences do in fact exist, they need not be attributed to biological factors. Generally, in our society, the role played by the daughter during childhood bears a closer correspondence to the role played by the mother than does the role of the son to that of the father. The girl commonly has her mother's company and shares her duties inside the home and out, and thereby serves a long and slow apprenticeship for adulthood and for her future responsibilities as wife and mother. Rarely, except perhaps in the case of the eldest son of a widowed mother, do the

duties placed upon a boy fore-shadow the responsibilities he will meet, either in the home as a husband and a father, or outside as a worker, a neighbour and a citizen. For boys, the transition to adulthood is more abrupt, and they have little warning during childhood of the changes it entails. The Family story, the Careers story and the Adolescent Novel all deal with the individual as a social being, dependent upon, and responsible for, certain other human beings in the family or the world at large. For the girls, such themes are relevant, both to their immediate lives and to the lives they look forward to as adults; the boys find little in them that applies to their present lives, nor as yet have they much reason to suppose that as adults they will be more concerned with questions of the sort. By convention and by training, the boy's affiliations and obligations are mainly to his peers, those of the girl to the family and community. Their reading both reflects and consolidates the difference.

This contrast of outlook between the boys and girls is again apparent in their attitudes towards books other than of fiction. It is fairly well established that, both in childhood and in adolescence, boys read more non-fiction than do girls, but that for neither sex does non-fiction form more than a fairly small proportion of their total reading. Books of this kind account for roughly 12 per cent of the total number issued to the boys, for 5 per cent of those issued to the girls. For the most part they deal with factual information, practical subjects, or general ideas, and as such hold little appeal for the girls, whose interest is mainly in the personal and human aspects of experience.

Non-fiction in the Junior Library is classified according to the Dewey Decimal system commonly in use in the public libraries of this country. The books most often borrowed, both by boys and girls, are those concerned with leisure pursuits (Dewey classification, 700-799), which make up roughly one-fifth of all the non-fiction borrowed.¹ Books on football, cricket, boxing, swimming, and camping attract the boys of eight and over, while those on horsemanship and tennis appeal chiefly to the girls. Books on in-door activities, drawing, acting, dancing, and, of course, knitting and embroidery, are borrowed for the most part by the girls, though the boys occasionally take out books dealing with woodwork and similar crafts. Children show little awareness at this stage of purely aesthetic considerations; they are quite indifferent to books on the appreciation of art, music, sculpture and the like, but are attracted by books which offer possible outlets for activity.

Books on scientific topics (Dewey classification, 500 - 599) come next in order of popularity among both boys and girls. The great majority of the books they borrow deal with the natural sciences, with nature study and, especially, with animal life. Accounts of animals in the zoo attract children from the age of six, and their interest extends later to books on wild life, on animals and birds, and to a lesser extent fish and insects, of the countryside. Among the most popular of these are the books of G. Bramwell Evens, in which the

1. See Appendix, Table 4.

naturalist, Romany, records his observations of wild life in the company of a young boy, Tim. Books on the mathematical and physical sciences, astronomy, chemistry and physics, are occasionally borrowed by the boys, but very rarely by the girls.

Books on the useful arts (Dewey classification, 600 - 699) are issued mainly to the boys, since the majority deal with technical and mechanical topics. The construction of ships, cars, locomotives and aeroplanes has great fascination for the boys, but among the books belonging to this category, only those which deal with the care of animals and other pets are borrowed in appreciable numbers by the girls. Books on the various public services, the army, navy, transport, the post-office and police, (Dewey classification, 300-399) are again much more popular with the boys than with the girls. It is interesting to see, on the other hand, that books connected with religion (Dewey classification, 200 - 299), literary works (Dewey classification 800 - 899) and biographies all rank higher with the girls than with the boys. In their choice of books, whether fiction or non-fiction, the girls reveal their constant concern with personal relationships and inner experiences, the boys their interest in the external world and in physical activity. It needs to be said again, perhaps, that this contrast is not necessarily associated with innate differences between the sexes. In recent times, anthropologists have shown that in one society the males may exhibit attitudes and modes of behaviour which in another society are characteristic of the females. There is a good deal of pressure, direct and indirect, upon the individual to conform to the pattern which the culture to

which he or she belongs prescribes for each of the sexes. The example of the parents and other elders is, of course, a most important factor in habituating boys and girls to their respective roles, but their reading also plays a considerable part in the process. Very often, one imagines, the boy who interests himself in poetry, or the girl who reads about locomotives, risks disparagement on the part of elders and contemporaries, and, what is more, the book adds its own authority to this disapproval when, as is often the case, it is obviously intended for the opposite sex. Writers of children's books, that is to say, do a great deal, deliberately and otherwise, to transmit to their readers modes of feeling, thought and action, deemed by society to be appropriate to their age and sex.

The taste for non-fiction, however acquired, is stronger among the boys than among the girls. At no age does it form more than ten per cent of all the books borrowed by the girls, whereas roughly a quarter of all those borrowed by the boys aged ten are works of information, and the proportion is relatively high at every age.

Children are given a good deal of encouragement, at school and elsewhere, to read such books, often at the expense of fiction, supposedly more frivolous and less educative. It may be a mistake, however, to urge children to devote much time to reading for information at the stage when it is vital that they should learn to read effortlessly and with enjoyment. Works of information are generally longer and more difficult to read than works of fiction, and the child who reads non-fiction is likely to read fewer books in total. In support of this it may be observed that the amount of

borrowing at each age tends to vary inversely with the amount of non-fiction taken out.¹ Among the boys aged ten, for example, when the amount of non-fiction read is at its highest, the total number of books borrowed is lower than at almost any age. Even more serious, perhaps, is the fact that as the amount of non-fiction rises the variety of all books borrowed tends to be more restricted. There is at least a suspicion that when children are encouraged at too early an age to read for information they may fail to read books in sufficient numbers to ensure that they gain the fluency in reading and the catholicity of taste which will enable them to derive continued pleasure from books.

In this respect, the reading habits of the girls appear generally healthier than the boys'. From year to year the girls' reading increases in variety and amount, whereas among the boys the number of books borrowed tends if anything to decline with age, and their variety to become more limited. The fact that the boys are more addicted to non-fiction than are the girls may have a bearing on this question. Moreover, the records of individual readers tend to confirm the impression that those who borrow only works of information are seldom avid readers. Among the readers who borrowed no fiction at all, the one who borrowed most - a boy aged ten - took out only nine books in the year, while many others visited the Library only once or twice. At the other end of the scale stands

1. Figure 5.

the ten-year-old girl who read little else but fiction, and who took out 165 books in the year. There can be little doubt that she is more likely than the boys to develop an interest in reading which will endure into later life, if only because she has had more opportunity to acquire fluency in reading, and to experience the wide variety of the benefits and satisfactions which books afford.

While, undeniably, there is value to children in reading books which add to their knowledge or their skill, even more important, it may be, are books which minister to their spiritual and moral development. "Most boys and girls", says the Newsom Report,¹ "want to be what they call 'being good' and they want to know what this really implies in the personal situations which confront them. They also want to know what kind of animal a man is, and whether ultimately each one of them matters - and, if so, why and to whom." Many adults look to literature for the answers to these questions, and it is evident from the books they read at different stages that children, too, consciously or unconsciously, look to stories for guidance in growing up. A balanced programme of reading during these formative years must include not only works of information, but also many which the child may read with little effort and for mere enjoyment. Though these may appear to have less immediate value, through reading them the child develops facility for reading and a growing appetite for books. If, in addition, they sharpen the child's awareness of himself and of other human beings, the total benefit they confer is very great.

1. Ministry of Education: Central Advisory Council for Education: "Half our Future", H.M.S.O. 1963, p.52.

CHAPTER IV.

From Easy Books to Difficult

It is obvious that children are swayed in their choice of books by considerations other than of mere subject-matter. Between two Fairy or two Adventure stories there may be many differences which serve to make one more attractive than the other, some of them differences in physical make-up - size, print and illustrations, others related to the content - language, style and treatment.

Bamberger (1922) suggests that children in their first year at school judge books mainly by their external, sensory appeal, but that in grades II and III they tend increasingly to take into account factors related to the content. In an ingenious experiment she selected five stories known to be enjoyed by children, and of each obtained five different editions. From the children's choices among these editions, she concludes that in order to attract young children a book should have a bright cover, preferably in blue; be $7\frac{3}{4}$ by 6 inches or larger in dimensions; contain approximately 58 pages, about 45 per cent of them given to full-page illustrations; and have no more than twelve or thirteen lines of print to each remaining page. Boyce (1953) likewise considers that primary school children are drawn to gay covers, meaningful pictures, fairly large type, and to print which is broken up into brief paragraphs. At the age of ten or eleven, according to Carsley (1957), children have strong feeling against the illustration of stories, though a picture on the dust-jacket is considered permissible, and illustrations are

thought necessary in works of information.

While there is no denying that a well-produced book may have great appeal for children, it seems probable, as Bamberger suggests, that only for the very young is the external appearance of a book important in its own right. To the infant unaware of the essential distinction between books and other play-things, the colour, size and shape may be the attributes which make a book attractive, but to slightly older children the physical appearance of a book is important principally because it enables them to judge the suitability of the contents. Illustrations, for example, are all too often ill-produced and unattractive in themselves, but this is of no great relevance to the slower reader, whose main concern is that they should show him quickly whether the book is of the kind he likes, and that they should supplement his understanding of the text. Apart from knowing what the book is about, before he makes his choice the reader needs to know whether it is within reach of his understanding and his capacity to read. The shape of the book, the number of pages, the amount of illustration and the size of print are important because they enable him to come to a decision on this question.

Today, the very size of the page often distinguishes the book intended for the very young. The great majority of adult books are produced in octavo format of Large Foolscap, Crown, Large Post, or Demy papers. The resulting pages range in size from $6\frac{3}{4}$ by $4\frac{1}{4}$ inches to $8\frac{3}{4}$ by $5\frac{5}{8}$ inches, while pages smaller or larger than this are nowadays associated mainly with children's books. This has not always

been the case. In 1623 Shakespeare's plays appeared in a Folio volume, and before that had been published in Quarto editions. Late in the eighteenth century, very small books in Duodecimo were much in vogue, while towards the end of the nineteenth century books with large pages and wide margins became very popular. In modern times, however, for reasons no doubt connected with the economics of mass production, the medium-sized Octavo format has become virtually standard for adult books, other formats being reserved principally for books not enjoying a wide sale and for those intended for the very young.

It may well be that young children prefer very small books for the good reason that they are more convenient to their small hands, and very large books because they lie easily across their knees, but more important is the fact that very small and very large pages have, through usage, become associated in their minds with books for the very young. The result is that as they grow older children tend increasingly to choose books with pages of what may for convenience be called medium size.¹ Among readers at the age of six, less than half the books borrowed are of medium size, the remainder being divided roughly equally between the very large and very small. Nor, at this age, are the books chosen all of the familiar shape; many are wider than they are long, others very long and very narrow. Readers become more conservative in their choice of format as they grow. Books in unusual shapes and sizes fall

1. See Appendix, Tables 5a and 5b.

sharply out of favour when children reach the age of eight, and by the age of twelve, 90 per cent or more of the books they choose are similar in format to adult books.

The format of a book tends therefore to be regarded as one indication of the age-group for which it is intended, and it is at least possible that children sometimes put off taking out a book simply because its appearance has given them a wrong impression, or even because they are anxious lest others who might see them read it should form a wrong impression. It is true that the ten-year-old boys take out an unusually large number of big books, most of them works of information; even so, it seems likely that the custom of producing works of information and books of poetry in unusual shapes and sizes does little to enhance their popularity with older children. At the same time, older children who are backward in reading are undoubtedly discouraged from borrowing books which are within their grasp, because their format makes it obvious that they are intended for younger children. In order to preserve their self-esteem, backward readers need books which, in external appearance at least, are indistinguishable from those borrowed by their abler age-mates.

The thickness of a book - the number of pages it contains - provides the reader with another indication of its suitability. One might expect that, as children become more fluent in their reading, they would in general choose longer books. The median length of the books borrowed from the Library rises from approximately fifty pages at the age of six to two hundred pages at the age of twelve.¹

1. See Appendix, Tables 6a and 6b.

That is to say, one half of the books issued to the six-year-olds contain more than fifty pages, and one half of the books borrowed by the twelve-year-olds contain more than two-hundred pages.

Progress towards longer books is slow between the ages of six and seven, while children are mastering the mechanics of reading in their first year at the junior school, but thereafter quickly gains momentum. By the age of nine, the girls are borrowing books one-half of which contain at least 150 pages, while the boys by this stage have made even better progress and are borrowing books with a median length of 190 pages. The boys' apparent superiority at this point is explained by the fact that a relatively high proportion of the books they borrow consists of works of information which are commonly very long. On the other hand, of course, they borrow at this age an average of only thirteen books a year, little more than half the number borrowed by the girls. On balance, therefore, at this age as at every age after that of eight, in terms of total quantity of reading the girls are in the lead.

Beyond the age of nine, the average length of the books rises more slowly as, after the first rapid steps towards mastery of reading, progress becomes more gradual. Even so, there are wide differences between individuals of the same age. Occasionally, a twelve-year-old may pick a book containing only twenty pages, while at the other extreme another may choose one more than three hundred pages long. It is not unusual to find the same range of variation among the books borrowed by a single reader, but by and large the majority of the books taken out by any reader tend to fall within

a narrower bracket, and the more advanced readers can be distinguished from the more retarded to some extent on the basis of the number of pages in the books they customarily choose. The books issued to the twelve-year-olds tend to show more uniformity of length than do those issued to those aged eleven or less, mainly because fairly suddenly at this point, children stop borrowing books with fewer than, say, 120 pages. This, one suspects, is not due to any sudden increase in reading ability; by this time many children have stopped borrowing from the Library, the majority of these, of course, being children whose reading ability is low. It is evident that twelve-year-olds will continue to read only if they are able to enjoy the books appropriate to their age, and to do so they need to be accustomed to reading books of reasonable length, perhaps between 170 and 230 pages long.

The shortest books of all are generally picture books, in which at least one half of all the pages are given up to full-page coloured illustrations. More than half those borrowed by the six-year-olds are of this kind, but beyond the age of seven as reading skills improve they fall rapidly out of favour. Nevertheless, pictures continue to hold a prominent place in the books which children borrow. Full-page illustrations for which the printed word merely provides captions give way to smaller pictures inserted in, and subordinate to, the text, but in the books issued to the eight-year-olds pictures take up roughly one-fifth of the total space, and in those borrowed by the twelve-year-olds, still occupy about four per cent.¹ For the younger

1. See Appendix, Tables 8a and 8b.

and less skilful readers, pictures are essential to their understanding of the book, and in works of information - in technical books and encyclopedias - they perform the same service for even older readers. In the fiction read by the older children they gradually come to have a different function. The full-page coloured frontispiece often found in the book intended for the eleven- or twelve-year-old serves to give the would-be reader some indication of the contents by which to judge its suitability; the small black-and-white illustrations in the text, when not purely decorative, tend to convey the mood and atmosphere of the story rather than specific situations or events.

Between books in which the burden of meaning is borne almost entirely by the pictures and those in which pictures are sparse and inessential come those, borrowed chiefly by the eight- and nine-year-olds, in which illustrations, usually in black and white, have a prominent though subordinate place, and punctuate the printed text at intervals with a visual summary of the situation. The extent to which readers rely upon these pictures varies, no doubt, with their reading skill, but their presence in a book ensures that its meaning can be understood by children of widely different ability. The popularity Enid Blyton's books enjoy^s among children of different ages and levels of achievement is in part explained by the fact that, while for the abler readers the printed text is sufficient in itself, others are given substantial help by the frequent illustrations. It seems unfortunate that very few books which, in content, are suitable for older children, make use of illustrations in this way.

It is worth considering whether many of the slower readers might not persist a little longer - long enough perhaps to acquire the reading habit - if in the sort of books they could enjoy there were sufficient illustrations to supplement their understanding of the print.

Not only the illustrations but the quality of the print itself can help to ease the slower reader's difficulties. That of Burt (1959) is the most recent of many studies of the effects of different kinds of print upon readability. The size, design and boldness of the type, the length of line, width of margins, interlinear spacing, all interact with one another to render print legible or otherwise, but, Burt concludes, the main factors which decide whether print is suitable for readers of a given age are the size of type and the interlinear spacing. When learning to read, children usually proceed from word to word, or even from letter to letter, and at this stage large type and wide spacing are most suitable because they facilitate recognition of these small units. To fluent readers, on the other hand, reading is essentially a process of assimilating groups of words in sequences long enough to convey meaning. For them, therefore, it is important that print, while large enough to permit words and letters to be identified, should yet be small enough to allow a fair number of words to be encompassed within the visual span. Children, and especially older children, therefore find print that is too large just as difficult to read as print that is too small. Thus, according to Burt, children under seven find it easiest to read print which has twelve lines to five inches of page, while children over

twelve find least difficulty with print which has thirty lines to five inches.¹

It is customary to measure type in 'points', a point being 0.013837", or approximately one seventy-second of an inch. The 'body' of a type is the measure in points of the height of the block upon which the type is cast. It is therefore equivalent to the height of the printed letter plus the space separating the letter from the line below. The print found by Burt to be most suitable for those under seven is equivalent therefore to type of thirty points, while twelve point type is most suited to those over twelve years of age. Type of the latter size is commonly employed in adult books.

After measuring the print in the books borrowed by children at each age, it was obvious that they tend to choose books which conform fairly closely to the standards Burt found to be appropriate to their age.² One half of the books issued to borrowers aged six are printed in type of twenty points or more, while the median size of type in books selected by the twelve-year-olds is approximately thirteen points. The following table shows clearly how children tend, as they grow older, to read books with smaller print:

1. Op. cit. p. 12.

2. See Appendix, Tables 9a and 9b.

Median Size of Type in Books issued at each age.

	Boys	Girls
Aged 6 yrs	18.9 points	20.4 points
7	18.5	18.8
8	14.8	17.1
9	13.5	15.0
10	13.4	13.5
11	13.0	13.3
12	13.1	13.0

The preference these children show at the age of eight or nine for more closely printed books is certainly the outcome of the rapid improvement in reading skills which follows entry to the junior school. Type of 17 points or more still predominates, however, in the books picked by the girls at eight years of age, when the boys have already graduated to print of less than fifteen points. In later years, too, the boys tend to select somewhat smaller print than do the girls. To some extent this reflects their greater liking for informative books, which are often set in quite small type. There is the other possibility, however, that boys whose reading ability is low are less prone than the girls to borrow from the Library. At the age of eleven, for instance, girls occasionally borrow books with print as large as thirty points or more; at this age no boy borrowed a book of more than twenty-one points. From about the age of nine, compared with girls, relatively few of the boys who join the Library borrow books with large type. This suggests that those boys who by this time are unable to read fairly small print with ease are unlikely to be attracted to the Library.

The size of the print is, of course, but one of the factors which go to determine the readability of a text. More important,

certainly, is the difficulty or otherwise of the language for which the print is a vehicle, and it is not surprising that Whitehead (1956) should have found that when choosing fiction children look for simple language.

It is not an easy matter to decide what makes one piece of writing more intelligible to the reader than another. Stolurov and Newman (1959) consider that no fewer than twenty-three factors may inter-act to determine whether a passage of prose will be easy or difficult to read, and of these a predominance of monosyllabic words and short sentences are the main characteristics making for easy reading. In order to measure readability, various formulae have been devised, notably by Lorge (1944) and Flesch (1948). The former takes into account not only vocabulary and sentence length but certain aspects of syntax and sentence structure; the latter, which is based solely on the average number of syllables per word and of words per sentence, is more easy to apply, especially when the tables compiled by Farr and Jenkins (1949) are employed. A score of 100 on the Flesch Readability scale indicates language made up almost entirely of monosyllabic words arranged in sentences averaging nine words or so in length. Language as easy as this is found only in the simplest children's books and can be understood by readers possessing very elementary skill. At the other extreme, scores of twenty or less indicate very difficult or technical language, intelligible only to very skilful readers or to those familiar with the subject-matter.

Between these extremes, the language of children's comics scores 90¹ points or more, pulp fiction 80, digests and popular non-fiction 60.

As Carsley(1957) points out,² and as was evident from observation of members of the Library, before choosing a book children almost invariably sample some of it, usually the opening paragraphs, partly perhaps to assure themselves that they have not read it before, and partly to find out if it can be read with reasonable ease. In order to discover the kind of language children look for in the books they choose, the Flesch Readability formula was applied to the first hundred words of every book issued to members, with the exception of those which were issued only once in the year. The resulting score is not a reliable measure of the difficulty of the entire book, since the style of the opening paragraph is not always typical of the rest, but for the present purpose we are not so much concerned with its actual readability as with the impression given to the child who samples the first paragraph or two.

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1. Flesch, R.; Op. cit.
Michaelis and Tyler (1951) found language scoring between 20 and 30 intelligible to college graduates; between 30 and 40 intelligible to college undergraduates; 45 to Grade XIII students.
Sward and Harris (1952) found that between 1873 and 1945, the readability score of certain American magazines for children remained fairly constant between 75 and 85.
 2. Op. cit., page 21.

As is to be expected, the younger readers tend to look for easy books, and older children are prepared to accept more difficult ones. The median score in those borrowed at the age of six is 83, falling by the age of twelve to 71 among those borrowed by the boys, to 74 among those issued to the girls.¹ What is more surprising is the fact that progress, as is evident from these figures, is so very slow, especially among the girls. Even the oldest children tend to avoid books which promise to be at all difficult to read; of those borrowed by the twelve-year-olds, no more than 15 per cent have scores of less than 60, the remainder being all easier to read than popular digests. Boys of the age of nine or ten, it is true, seem a little more prepared than others to tolerate some difficulty in their books, doubtless because at that stage they have considerable interest in works of information. When this phase passes at the age of eleven, the boys, like the girls, obviously prefer, in the fiction which they read, language which presents no obstacles to their swift following of the narrative.

There is evidence from other quarters that the books which children find enjoyable are rarely difficult enough to put a strain upon their reading skill. McDonald (1953), for example, found considerable discrepancies between the reading ability of secondary modern school children and the demands made on them by the books they most preferred. Hugh Lofting's "Doctor Doolittle", for instance,

1. See Appendix, Tables 10a and 10b.

though its readability score suggested that it was suitable for nine-year-olds, proved most popular among the twelve-year-olds, and in the majority of other instances, McDonald found a difference of at least one year between what he terms a book's popularity age and its readability age.¹ He also makes the suggestion that boys are more prone than girls to read books appropriate to their ability, and this is borne out by the present evidence that except at the ages of six and seven the boys borrow books which are in general more difficult than those borrowed by the girls. This is perhaps another indication that the weaker readers among the boys tend not to join the Library.

Simplicity of language is but one of the qualities which distinguish the style of one book from that of another. Flesch has pointed out² that the language of, say, a scientific treatise differs from that of a personal anecdote in the incidence of colloquialisms, abbreviations, dialogue, proper nouns, and pronouns referring to individuals. The extent to which these elements are found in reading matter is a measure of what Flesch terms its human interest. On the scale devised by Flesch for measuring human interest, reading material is classified as Dramatic (Score 60-100), Highly Interesting (40-60), Interesting (20-40), Mildly Interesting (10-20) or Dull (0-10). Flesch claims, probably with reason, that

1. Op. cit., p. 45

2. Op. cit.

language which has a high degree of human interest is more easily comprehended by the reader, and insists that the human interest of a text be taken into account as well as its reading ease in order to assess its readability.

Flesch's formula for calculating human interest was applied to the first one hundred words of each book issued, again excepting those which had been issued only once.¹ This confirmed, if confirmation is necessary, that children look for a high degree of human interest in their books. The girls especially showed a strong preference for books written in what Flesch describes as a dramatic style: at least one-half of the books they borrowed at each age scored more than 60 on the scale of human interest. The median score of the books chosen by the boys fell somewhat below this at the ages of eight, nine, ten, and twelve, reaching its lowest point of 48 at the age of ten. This reflects the relative popularity among boys at certain ages of works of information, in which, naturally, the style is far less racy and colloquial than is general in works of fiction. In terms of human interest, the contrast between the books chosen by the boys and those chosen by the girls is sharpest at the age of ten when the boys' fondness for non-fiction is at its height. For reasons which are not immediately apparent, the boys at the age of eleven borrow more books in total than at the age of ten, but

1. See Appendix, Tables 11a and 11b.

proportionately fewer works of information. Whereas, at the age of ten, the boys' reading is much more 'serious' than the girls', the difference is much smaller at the age of eleven. The change is reflected in the human interest scores of the books they choose. The following table gives the percentages of the books issued to children aged 10 and 11 years classified according to the degree of human interest manifested in their language and style.

Human Interest Score	Aged 10 years		Aged 11 years	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
40 and above	58%	79%	69%	77%
Below 40	37%	18%	27%	21%

Once again one is obliged to ask whether the boys who, especially at the age of ten, borrow a large number of serious books, do so at the price of curtailing the total volume of their reading, and whether this policy leads to the full enjoyment of reading and the growth of a lasting interest in books.

It would be possible, from the fore-going data, to construct a profile, so to speak, of the superficial features-format, length, type, illustrations, style - of the average book that appeals to the average boy or girl at a given age. This might even have some value as a guide to those concerned with the selection and provision of books suitable for children, but it might imply much more uniformity of taste than in fact occurs. Far more important, at least to the teacher, than the task of catering for what are imagined

to be the average tastes of the class is that of ensuring that each child reads at his or her own level, and makes the best progress he or she is capable of towards more mature reading. Side by side with the business of giving the requisite training in the basic reading skills should go that of guiding children to books which will help them to develop the fluency which is essential to enjoyment. The sheer volume of reading is decisive here, and it is vitally important that the books which children are encouraged to read for pleasure are not so difficult as to hinder rapid reading. We have seen that, when free to choose for themselves, children usually read books which are well within their capacity, and that, at least in language, the books chosen by the twelve-year-olds are not vastly more difficult than those picked by children of six or seven. This, perhaps, affords a clue to the treatment of the slower reader. Through careful selection, it should often prove possible to give the slower reader the satisfying experience of reading books which are not patently less demanding than those read by other children. Certainly he will find neither pride nor pleasure in reading books obviously intended for readers much younger than himself. On the other hand, he might find it possible to read books containing quite as many pages, and on subjects much the same as in those enjoyed by others of his age, if the print were slightly larger, the illustrations more numerous and more informative, the sentences slightly shorter, and the style a little more dramatic. Nor would the better readers necessarily be repelled by such a book; among the books of Enid Blyton there are many which, by virtue of their large type, frequent illustrations, simple language and colloquial style, are within the scope of quite

young children, and yet retain their popularity with older readers.

The time given to reading instruction in our schools is justifiable only if the children thereafter make full and proper use of the skill they have acquired. There is good reason to believe that unless the reading habit is deeply ingrained when they are at school, many children will allow their skill to fall into disuse once they leave. Enquiries among National Service men¹ have revealed that many of those who had made some use of libraries while at school no longer did so two years later. Even among those leaving grammar schools, the proportion using libraries fell from 89 to 55 per cent, while among secondary modern pupils the decline was even steeper, from 68 to 16 per cent. For many boys, we suggest, the moment of decision comes at about the age of eleven or twelve, at the end of their primary school lives, or very early in their secondary school careers. It is of particular importance at this stage that everything possible should be done to sustain their interest in reading. A renewed effort may be necessary at this time to perfect the reader's skills to the point of enabling him to read with pleasure the kinds of books appropriate to his new status, both as a student entering upon the secondary phase of education, and as a human being trying to meet the changes, within himself and without, which accompany adolescence. More is implied than a remedial course for backward readers; what is intended

1. Crowther Report.

rather is that reading instruction for the majority of children should move into a second phase in which the emphasis is upon increasing the speed and fluency of reading by means of techniques evolved for this purpose in recent years and fairly commonly employed in American schools and colleges.

The quality of reading instruction given in schools is not to be measured by the mere quantity of printed matter consumed; nevertheless, sheer voracity on the part of the young reader is the surest means of gaining fluency and of strengthening the reading habit and constitute the prerequisites of continued progress towards mature reading tastes. This emphasises the importance of making available to children a plentiful supply of books so graded in respect of readability that the learner's confidence never falters, and his pleasure in reading is never marred by fear of failure. The experiments begun in 1961, employing Pitman's Initial Teaching Alphabet, already show that the fewer obstacles there are to fluent reading, the greater are the beginner's self-confidence, his enthusiasm for reading and his interest in books.¹ The problem of maintaining this confidence and enthusiasm in later years, and especially from the age of eleven or twelve, prompts one to question whether the policy, commonly adopted by teachers of English, of encouraging the intensive study of a small number of demanding 'classics' meets the needs of the majority of children, even in our grammar schools. A programme designed to encourage extensive reading for enjoyment, especially of contemporary writings, rather than intensive study, might better serve what must be the main purpose of all literary training, that of ensuring that the learner should continue

1. Downing, John A. 1963. Page 23.

to read throughout life, and to derive pleasure and profit from his reading. To be sure, it is legitimate, even essential, to acquaint the learner with our literary tradition and our cultural heritage. The mistake is to assume that the essence of our inheritance has been crystallized for ever in certain revered writings of the past, and that to know these is essential to every educated person. The true contribution to our culture of the writers of the past, however, is surely not in their writings, but in the impression they have left indelibly on our ways of thinking, feeling and behaving. In each of the works produced today some part of that contribution is preserved; together they embody what is of enduring value in the literature of the past. If this is true, then extensive reading of modern writings is as good a way as any other of introducing children to our common culture. But even if this were not the case, reading makes accessible to us the thoughts and experiences of other men; to sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch, it adds another sense, to be deprived of which is to be impoverished. What is above all important, then, is that children should have an insatiable appetite for books, and that means that their experience of reading should overwhelmingly be one of enjoyment, unmarred by failure or frustration.

CHAPTER V

Heroes and Heroines

From a book's external features - its format, print, language and so on - a child judges how easy or difficult it will be to read, and whether, therefore, it will be within his scope of understanding. But there is more to choosing a book than that. The would-be reader looks beyond the externals to the content of the book to find whether it is to his taste. And when choosing fiction he looks especially at the central character or characters whose actions, thoughts and feelings the book recounts, for unless there is some bond of sympathy between the reader and the protagonists of the story the book must fail in its appeal.

Children tend, for reasons of which they are not necessarily aware, to look in a book for a character with whom they can identify themselves. When the reader is able to assume the identity of one of the characters, he has the illusion of participating directly in the experiences recounted in the book, and the impression made upon him is the more vivid as a result. Apart from this, an element of wish-fulfilment may be involved. Even the free-est and least frustrated of us is aware of areas of experience to which he has no access, and of satisfactions which he cannot know; each in his own identity is subject to humiliating limitations, circumscribed in time and space, fettered to his physical frame, and subject to the pressures of the society in which he lives. All readers, therefore,

irrespective of age, read partly in order to transcend their personal and temporal limitations. Children especially are prone to compensate for their own inadequacies through day-dreaming, play-acting and reading. There is another, more obviously wholesome, reason why children assume the roles of characters in fiction. They are in the process of forming their own personalities. This entails a great deal of experimentation in a variety of rôles, and a great deal of imitation of many different models, the majority of which will ultimately be rejected as unsuitable or unattainable, while others are assimilated to become a permanent part of the individual's self-image. Throughout childhood and into adolescence the youngster dons a succession of different personalities, copied from the cinema, from the theatre, from books and from life, and in the process arrives at an assessment of his own limitations and potentials, and formulates his own ambitions and ideals. In this sense, therefore, the child who looks in books for characters with whom he can identify himself is performing instinctively an activity which is necessary to his development and growth.

It is rarely possible to do more than guess from which of these motives a given reader visualises himself as playing a certain role in a certain book. Sometimes, when the gap between the fictional character and the reader is very wide, as when a girl of twelve reads about a child among the fairies, or a boy of nine sees himself as a spaceman on a flight to Mars, we may

suspect that the dominant desire is for escape from actuality rather than for a fuller understanding of it. Even then, however, it would be rash to assume that the desire for escape or compensation is the only motive. Why a child should wish to doff his own and don an alien personality is a matter for which no simple, clear-cut explanation can suffice.

It is not always easy, either, to explain why a reader should be drawn to one character or type of character rather than to another. In many cases, of course, there is an obvious and superficial affinity between the reader and the fictitious character whose role he assumes. Children usually prefer to read books which are chiefly concerned with characters of the same sex and approximately of the same age as themselves.

There are, of course, many exceptions to this. The central figure is not in every case a human being. Indeed, it is rare to find a human character among the puppets in the stories read by the youngest children. Again, children at all ages choose a few books in which an animal, usually a horse or dog, plays the principal part. Moreover, throughout the years with which we are concerned, the taste continues for works of information in many of which there are no heroes or heroines of any kind. The result is that among the books chosen by boys and girls at the age of six roughly two-thirds contain no living characters at all, or have as their central figures, not human beings, but puppets, fairies, or animals.

The following table shows, however, that as readers grow older, they increasingly demand books in which the main roles are borne by human beings.

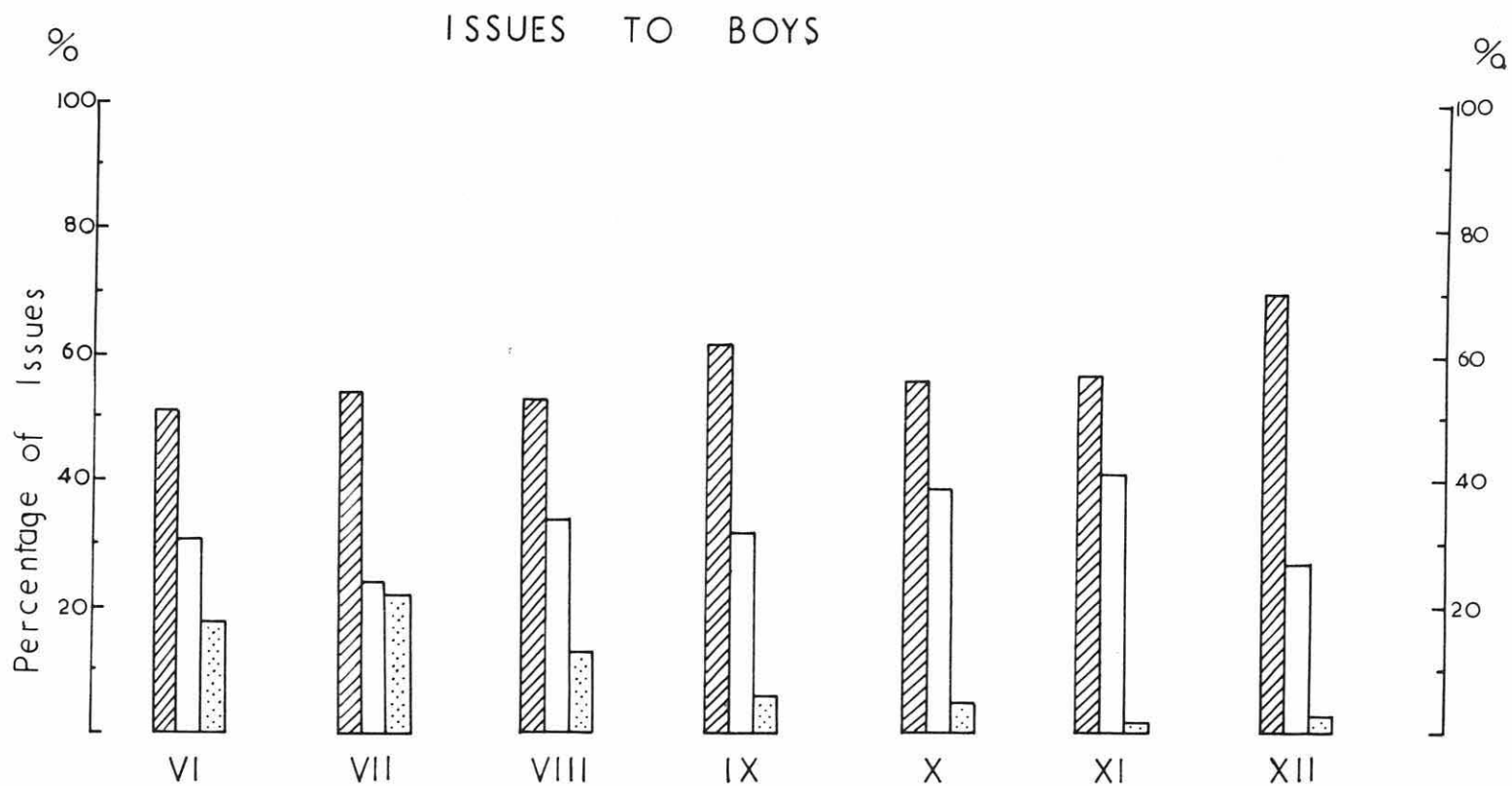
Percentage of Issues containing a Human Hero or Heroine.

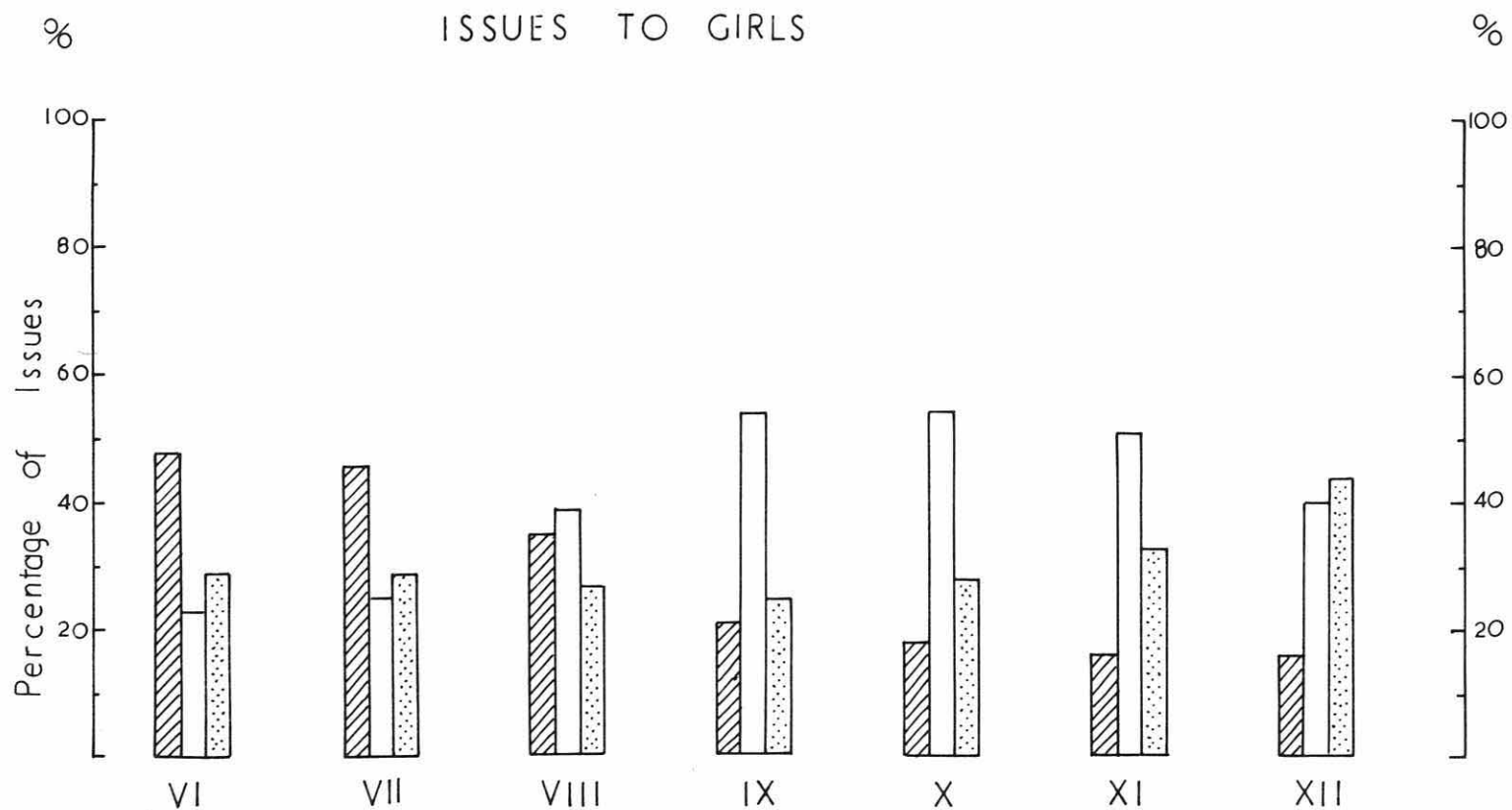
Age	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Boys	33%	42%	57%	85%	73%	84%	89%
Girls	40%	44%	52%	71%	86%	86%	94%


Whereas only 33 per cent of the books chosen by the boys aged six have a human hero, by the age of nine in 85 per cent the centre of the stage is held by a human being. The remainder of those chosen at this age are almost entirely works of information which contain no living characters at all. The girls are rather slower to abandon stories which revolve about central figures other than human beings. In more than 20 per cent of the books they choose at the age of nine, there are still no human beings to play important parts, and even in later years they occasionally read stories in which the chief protagonists are puppets, fairies, or animals.

To consider for the moment only those books in which the focal point of interest is a human being or a group of human beings, it becomes evident that these children tend to prefer those books in which the heroes or heroines have some resemblance to themselves. Thus the boys tend to choose stories in which the principal character is male, while the girls usually look for stories centred on a girl. There are many books, of course, which involve a group of characters of either sex, and in which boys and girls, or men and


FIGURE 6.
ANALYSIS OF ISSUES SHOWING SEX OF MAIN CHARACTERS





 Books with
heroes only.

 Books with
heroes and
heroines.

 Books with
heroines only.

Note: Books having no human characters are excluded.

women, play equally important parts. Such books are common among those borrowed by boys and girls at every age, but among children over the age of eight they are considerably more popular with the girls than with the boys. The younger boys, as is shown in Figure 6, are moderately willing to read books intended for girls, and in which girls assume the main roles, but from about the age of nine they avoid almost entirely books which have no man or boy to play the hero. The girls are at all ages much more ready to read books which are chiefly concerned with a member of the opposite sex; indeed, until the age of eight, they are as likely to choose a book centred upon a boy as upon a girl, and although, as they grow older, they tend increasingly to pick books which revolve around a female character and are therefore intended exclusively for girls, even at the age of twelve they continue to read a substantial number of books ostensibly designed for boys.

Evidently the role of males in life and in society is held in some esteem by the girls, whereas the boys tend to despise the roles played by girls and women. Teachers are accustomed to bear this point in mind when selecting books for reading by mixed classes, especially beyond the age of eight or nine. More often than not, as a result, books are chosen mainly with the boys in mind, since the girls are more accommodating in their tastes. It might be argued, however, that too exclusive a preoccupation with a world dominated by males is good neither for the boys nor for the girls. It is generally agreed that in the later years of secondary education, boys are less capable than girls of appreciating the works of the great novelists. One wonders whether a less restricted range of reading in their

earlier years might not be a better preparation for the reading of adult fiction, which, after all, calls for insight into, and sympathy with, the rôle and character of women as well as of men. Moreover, as a preparation for mature living, there is perhaps some value in a boy's reading books which enable him to look at life through eyes other than his own or those of his own sex.

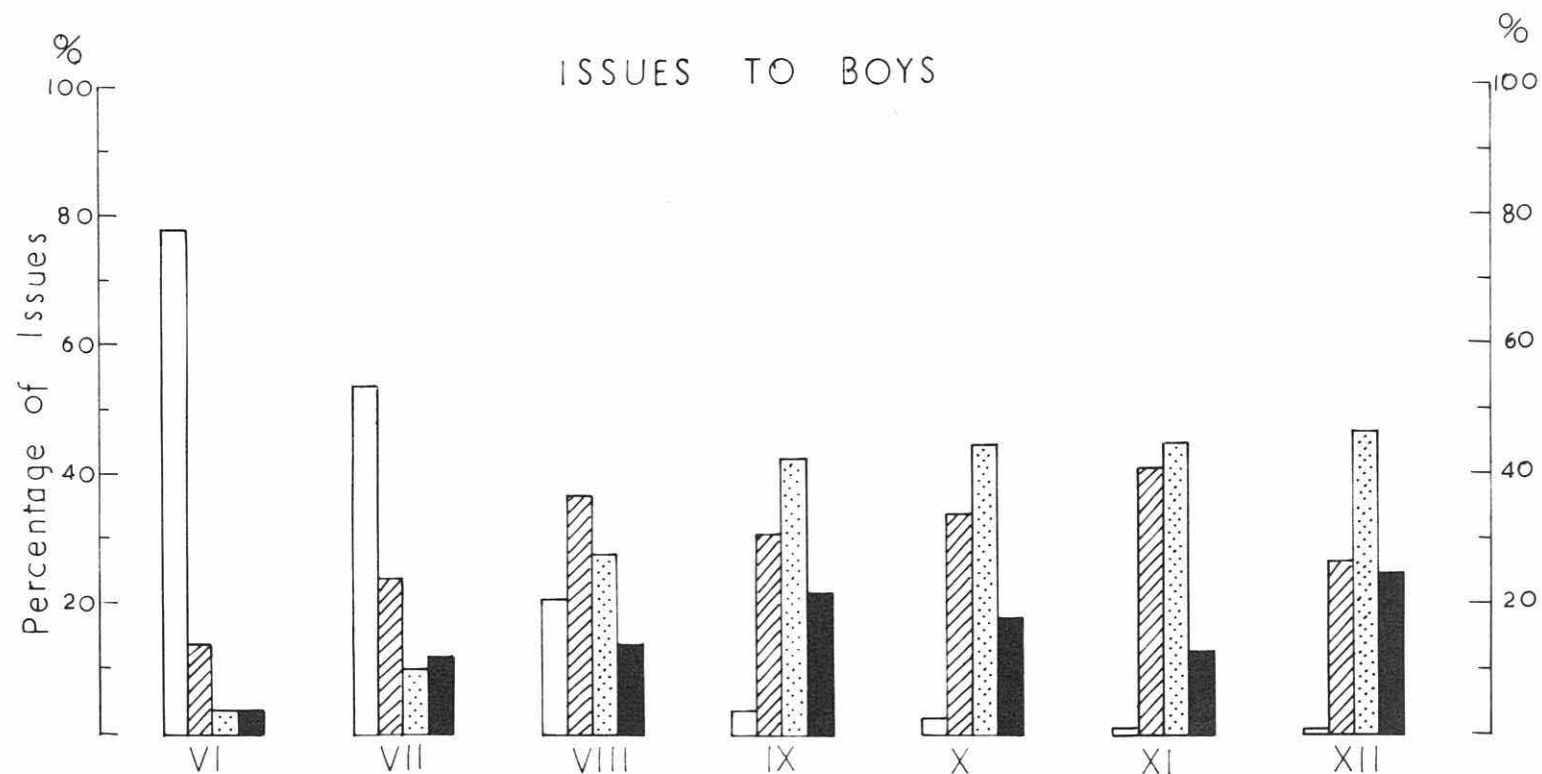
The fact is, however, that from the age of eight or nine, the boys prefer to identify themselves with male characters in fiction, the girls with females. It is curious that a boy in his reading should be able to find pleasure in assuming the identity of a Stone Age man, of a Martian, or even of a wild animal, and yet find it distasteful to adopt in imagination a female role. As a child reads a book, he tends to don the personality, or certain aspects of the personality, of one or other of its characters, as part of a continuous search for a role which is suited to his capacities and which will win for him the approval of others. It is part, that is to say, of his search for ideals, for models on which to pattern his own development. By the age of nine or so, his image of himself, though far from complete, is already taking outline; from about this time, the boy tends to regard himself as irredeemably male. Other questions may remain unsettled: whether to be a scientist or an explorer, a gallant leader or a faithful follower, introvert or extravert, gregarious or solitary, conformist or rebel; throughout his life, in fact, occasions for choosing between alternative ways of thinking, feeling and behaving will constantly arise, but on each of these questions his decision

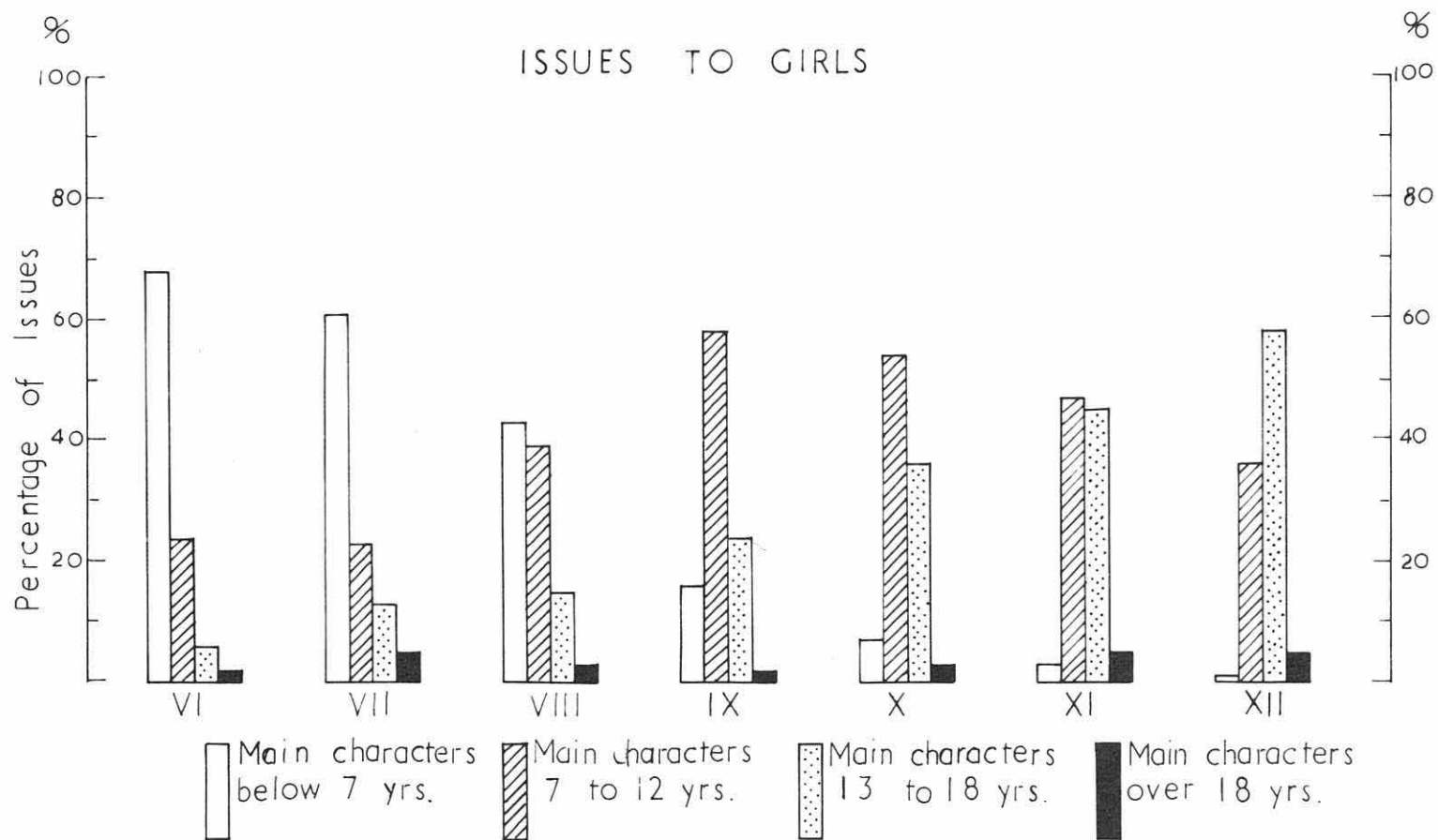
will henceforth depend in part on what he thinks befits his sex.

It is not enough, however, that the main character should be of the same sex as the reader; for the most part children prefer to identify themselves with characters of approximately their own age. The books issued to the six-year-old boys may serve to illustrate this. Of the 262 books borrowed, only 87 contained a recognisable human being; the others were all concerned with fairies, toys or animals. In 68 of the 87, the principal human character was a child of pre-school or infant school age; in twelve, the main character was of junior school age; in three, the hero or heroine was an adolescent, and in four an adult. Older readers, naturally, read many more books dealing with children of primary school age, and upwards, and after the age of eight very rapidly abandon stories about the very young.

It is not always easy to assign an age to the principal character. In order to render books attractive to children over a wide range of ages, authors often avoid specifying too closely the age of their characters. Others, for the same purpose, write about a group of characters of different ages, and this, too, sometimes makes it difficult to decide upon the age of the hero or heroine. Nevertheless, Figure 7 tries to show what proportion of the books borrowed at each age revolve around young children, juniors, adolescents and adults respectively. It will be seen that the majority of the heroes and heroines favoured by readers before the age of eight are

FIGURE 7.
ANALYSIS OF ISSUES SHOWING AGE OF MAIN CHARACTERS





Note: Books having no human characters are excluded.

themselves, so far as one can judge, below the age of seven. At the ages of eight, nine and ten, the books which the boys borrow are fairly evenly divided between those in which the main character is of primary school age, and those dealing with an adolescent, but the trend is clearly towards books concerned with older characters. This is especially evident at the age of twelve, when a substantial proportion (25 per cent) of the books issued to the boys have adult heroes.

The same tendency is apparent among the girls. They, too, as they grow older tend to read stories centred upon older characters, but they lag some way behind the boys. It is noticeable, for example, that at every age fewer of their books deal with adults, and even at the age of twelve a small number of those they choose are still concerned with children less than seven years old. The differences between the boys and girls in this respect emerge more clearly, perhaps, from the following table, which gives the average age¹ of the main characters in the books borrowed at each age.

Average age in years of heroes and heroines in books borrowed.

At age	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
By Boys	5.1	7.9	11.0	13.9	13.7	13.2	15.0
By Girls	5.4	6.6	7.8	9.8	11.1	11.7	13.0

1. To arrive at these averages, characters of pre-school age were assumed to be aged three, junior school characters aged nine, adolescents fifteen, and adults twenty-one. It must be stressed that the resulting estimates of the average ages of heroes and heroines are purely arbitrary and useful only for purposes of comparison.

The boys, especially after the age of seven, show a decided preference for reading about characters older than themselves. The boys of eleven are to some degree exceptional in that their books, on the whole, have younger characters than do those chosen by the boys of nine and ten. They read more books with schoolboy heroes, and fewer books with adult heroes than do younger boys, and in this sense, the boys who patronise the Library at the age of eleven seem to be less mature in their reading tastes than those who join the Library earlier. The majority of those who continue to be members at the age of twelve, however, firmly turn their backs upon stories dealing with younger children, and show an increasing preference for those with adult heroes.

In this respect, the girls seem less precocious than the boys. Although it is true that even at the ages of six and seven they read a number of books dealing with characters of primary school age or older, beyond the age of seven they are much slower than the boys in seeking books concerned with adolescents or adults. Even at the age of twelve, only rarely do they choose books with an adult hero or heroine, and it is generally the case that whereas the boys tend to identify themselves with fictional characters older than themselves, the girls more readily find themselves in sympathy with characters very close to their own age.

These differences reflect two radically different attitudes to reading, the one an essentially realistic approach more common among the girls, the other an escapist approach more characteristic

of the boys. There is a sense, of course, in which all reading may be said to be escapist; the vicarious experience acquired through identification with a fictitious character cannot be equated with first-hand, actual experience. Nevertheless, there is an important difference between the reader who seeks through reading to shed light on his own immediate predicament, and one whose reading has no practical bearing on his real problems. At all events, we are justified in saying that the girls appear to read for the purposes of exploring the present, while the boys tend rather to read in order to anticipate the future.

It is usually easier for a reader to have fellow-feeling for a character of the same age and sex, but this superficial resemblance is not always essential, nor is it ever enough, to ensure that a sense of fellowship does arise. Boys and girls demand more of their heroes and heroines than that they should be of a certain age or sex; by their qualities, their circumstances, or achievements, they must also win their readers' sympathy or admiration. Children, that is to say, look to their heroes and heroines to realise some ideal. This does not mean, at any rate for the younger readers, that the central figure must be of heroic stature; the reader's response may well be one of sympathy rather than of admiration, but at all events, the hero or heroine must appear to the reader to be in an enviable position, and for this reason young readers almost invariably require the outcome of the story to be happy.

These children clearly envy those characters in fiction who enjoy or finally achieve a happy, stable family life. Only in Family stories does this form the central theme, but in many others of the books they choose the central figure is portrayed as being or becoming a contented, valued member of a family. In those borrowed by the younger readers it may be that a discarded doll is recovered and restored to favour, or a straying dog or pony finds a haven and a loving owner, while older readers may prefer to read of waifs who find their parents, or of children who do something to maintain the happiness of their family life. The following table gives the percentage of books in which the main character is shown in this light:

Age	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
By Boys	24	19	18	11	11	9	12
By Girls	26	30	30	27	28	27	26

The boys are at all ages much less prone than are the girls to expect their favoured characters to have a happy home life. Between the boys and girls aged six the differences in this respect are small, but from the age of seven, the boys become steadily less interested in the family life of their heroes, until at the age of eleven in less than ten per cent of the books chosen by the boys is any significance attached to the part played by the home in the lives of the characters of whom they read. The twelve-year-olds show a little more concern with this aspect of their heroes' affairs, and this is perhaps the first sign of the development on the part

of the boys of an interest in emotional and psychological situations which has long characterised the girls, but which exerts a decisive influence upon the reading tastes of the boys only in the period of adolescence beyond that at present being considered.

The prestige which certain characters enjoy among their readers, then, stems at least in part from their enviable status as members of a family, but another cause of honour, additional or alternative to this, is often the position they enjoy or win as accepted and valued members of a community. In the books chosen by the younger children, animals and toys are often depicted as living together in accordance with rules and conventions which are broadly those by which human society is governed. Human values, too, prevail, and stress is often laid upon the importance of being socially accepted or admired. Approval is bestowed on characters who contribute to the general welfare or who behave in accordance with acknowledged standards. Many of these stories for the very young appear to have the moral or didactic purpose, rarely openly expressed, of setting such qualities as courtesy, truthfulness and unselfishness in a favourable light. In much the same way, in many of the Gang stories read by children of junior school age, the main characters are shown living among grown-up neighbours on whose support and friendliness they can rely, or whose esteem they have gained by their services to the community or qualities of character. In Careers stories, the adolescent's desire to become a useful member of society forms

the central theme, but in many books of other kinds adolescent characters are portrayed as having similar ambitions. The following table shows that in more than 20 per cent of the books borrowed by the girls at every age, the main characters are portrayed as enjoying or achieving acceptance in the community.

At Age	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
By Boys	29	28	25	16	12	8	10
By Girls	24	25	26	22	21	21	28

In the middle years, these readers seem less disposed to favour characters who display the civic virtues. The boys aged nine to eleven, especially, have slight regard for the role their heroes play as members of the community at large; the law-abiding, the conformist, the socially acceptable are too prosaic to win their admiration. In the same years among the girls there is a similar, though much smaller, decline in the number of books portraying characters as worthy members of society, but with the emergence of the Careers story and the Adolescent novel among the twelve-year-olds, the number of such characters rises sharply.

That a character should be acceptable to the community at large is not necessarily incompatible with his finding favour with his peers. As has already been mentioned, among the Gang stories there are many which deal with the activities of groups of friends who together perform some act of service to the community, and thereby prove their social worth. On the other hand, the standards of the juvenile gang are often seen as being opposed to,

or at any rate not identical with, those of the adult community at large. Moreover, it is more often in girls' books than in boys' that allegiance to the group is combined with duty to the community. As instances of this, Kathleen Fidler's "St. Jonathan's in the County" and Monica Edwards's "Storm Ahead", both mentioned in an earlier chapter, are more popular with the girls than with the boys. In contrast, the boys are more apt to choose stories in which the central character wins his place in a group of youngsters bent on activities which, if not always mischievous or directed against adults, are rarely claimed to be of great advantage to society.

The following table shows, as a percentage of all the books borrowed at each age, those in which the main character is depicted as an accepted member of a peer group.

At Age	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
By Boys	9	13	19	29	31	46	38
By Girls	16	11	16	34	41	46	46

In the stories chosen by the younger children, characters seldom belong to a gang; more often than not, even the toys and puppets are shown as members of a family or a community with a hierarchy based on age, social position, or authority. Older readers, on the other hand, and especially those aged ten, eleven and twelve, look to their heroes and heroines to justify themselves among their age-mates, and to give their main allegiance to the gang rather than to the family or community. This is the period

during which the School story, the Pony story and the Gang story are at the height of their popularity, but in many others of the books read at this time, a great deal of stress is laid upon the importance of having friends and being popular. Typical of these are the Mystery stories of Enid Blyton, which owe their overwhelming popularity over other tales of mystery largely to the fact that they offer their readers vicarious membership of a friendly circle.

As the Adventure story grows in favour, especially among the boys, a new kind of hero comes to the fore, usually an adolescent, but one whose achievements win for him admittance to an exclusive circle of adult males. In the Western stories of Rex Dixon, for example, the lad Pocomoto wins his spurs as a member of a cow-boy band, while in the stories of Percy F. Westerman another youth is shown winning his place in a ship's crew. An even more illuminating example is the sixteen-year-old boy who, in the stories of Eric Leyland, is as trusty and aggressive as any of the followers of Rip Randall, and who first wins his place in this band of fighters against crime by dint of having been expelled from school for nearly shooting the headmaster with a .22 rifle. These characters inhabit a world from which females are excluded; their allegiance is neither to the family, to their peers, nor to society at large, but solely to the male band, to which the youth is admitted on giving evidence of remarkable virility. In much the same way, in the stories of Elsie J. Oxenham, girls are admitted to a select circle of their elders by virtue of their femininity, evidenced by their having been May Queens, or being adept at certain esoteric

dances. Girls' books of this kind are much rarer than Adventure stories. There are important differences between them, too, but they are alike in that they represent adult life in romantic terms, and portray grown-ups as a species apart, immune to social pressures, contemptuous of convention, authority and civic obligations.

The following table gives, as a percentage of all the books borrowed at each age, those in which characters of this type appear:

At Age	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
By Boys	2	4	9	20	19	18	25
By Girls	1	2	2	4	7	8	9

It will be seen that from the age of nine, the boys are very strongly attracted to books of this kind, having as their hero a youth who collaborates with a band of grown-ups. No less than a quarter of those chosen by the boys aged twelve are of this type. Among the girls, too, it is the older ones who mostly read these stories, but it is to be remembered that apart from those of Elsie J. Oxenham, few books intended for girls have heroines of this sort, and that girls interested in such stories have to make do, for the most part, with books intended for boys, in which males play the important parts.

In any case, the girls are much less addicted to these stories than are the boys, being much more inclined to read of characters whose prestige is due to their position in the family, community or peer group. They are no less concerned than are the boys with the prospect of achieving adult status, but they envisage it in

much more realistic terms. Through day-long contact with the mother in the home, they are familiar with the role of adult women in real life. They learn sufficient of the truth about women's position and activities to be able to reject flagrantly distorted versions in their fiction. The boys on the other hand have fewer opportunities to observe their father's daily life, and there are fewer checks upon the fantasies they weave about the world of men. It is a world from which they are excluded, and it therefore exerts on them the fascination of the secret and the forbidden; their imagination invests it with mystery and peril, and the men who move in it with superhuman qualities and powers. It is to be expected then that the older boys should seek to identify themselves with youths who have been initiated into this world, or with adult characters of heroic stature, at a time when the girls attach themselves to adolescent heroines who gain some standing in the every-day world, and who win the respect of older men and women by virtue of common-place human qualities and talents.

The main characters in the books read by the younger children are portrayed differently in certain other ways from those in the books read by older children. In the former, the child, animal or toy occupying the main role is generally described in very simple terms as embodying perhaps a single trait of character - curiosity, friendliness, or mischief. In contrast, the main figures in books enjoyed by the older readers are more complex; they are depicted in a wider range of circumstances and reveal more facets of their personality. Not only that, but the qualities and

capabilities with which they are endowed are different. It goes almost without saying that the attributes a young boy looks for in his heroes are not always highly regarded by older readers, or by readers of the opposite sex.

To find an illustration of this, one might look at books in which the main character is depicted as in need of care and protection, as being dependent for his or her well-being upon older or stronger members of the family or community. The children who read these books, it may be supposed, are greatly concerned with their own need for affection and security, and are therefore much disposed to envy characters in stories who succeed in eliciting protective responses from those around. As the following table shows, stories centred upon such characters form roughly a quarter of all the books read by the boys before the age of eight, and by the girls before the age of nine. Naturally, as they grow older, readers find themselves less in sympathy with characters in this submissive role, though they continue to appear relatively often in the books selected by the girls.

Books containing Submissive Characters as Percentage of all books borrowed.

At Age	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
By Boys	23	25	13	2	2	2	2
By Girls	30	28	22	11	6	6	3

Many factors in our social life combine to help the child to form an image of the role deemed suitable for him or her to play,

and the books the child reads contribute a great deal to this conception. They play some part, no doubt, in bringing about the common acceptance of the idea that submissiveness and dependence are to be admired in the female and despised in the male. To judge from their reading tastes, certainly, boys and girls tend to subscribe to this view. An attitude of obedience towards parents, for example, seems to be thought more fitting in a girl than in a boy. Rarely after the age of eight do the boys choose books in which the chief characters are markedly dutiful towards their elders; on the contrary, characters such as Richmal Crompton's William, whose essential attitude to older people is one of rebelliousness, become increasingly popular with the boys, so that of the books they read at eleven and twelve, roughly 12 per cent contain characters of this type, more than twice the proportion read by the girls. The latter, on the other hand, read a much higher proportion (9%) of books in which there are characters whose dutiful demeanour inspires pride and affection in their elders.

Another quality more highly regarded by the boys than by the girls is that of daring or intrepidity. This is the quality by which a character in fiction endears himself to his age-mates, and wins acceptance in the peer group. It is most often found, therefore, in characters in the books enjoyed by children aged from nine to twelve, the period during which the child's main need seems to be for the fellowship of equals, and when this need expresses itself in a liking for books in which characters are

shown as enjoying such fellowship. In fiction, at least, a girl may win friends by the display of qualities other than fearlessness, but, as the following table shows, this is the virtue which above all others marks the heroes of the books chosen by the older boys.

Books in which Main Characters display Intrepidity,
as Percentage of all Books borrowed.

At Age	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
By Boys	3	6	15	31	33	39	38
By Girls	1	3	5	13	17	18	19

As they grow older, readers tend to associate courage with aggressiveness, and increasingly their heroes come to display pugnacious or war-like attributes. Once more, it is for the boys that such qualities have the greater appeal, and above all for the twelve-year-olds, to whom, in fiction if not in reality, aggressiveness has come to be equated with manliness, and deeds of violence come to be seen as the means of winning grown-up men's regard. With the rising popularity of the Adventure story, and as fictional heroes steadily become older, the aggressive hero comes increasingly to the fore, until, as the following table shows, he takes the central role in nearly a quarter of the books borrowed by the boys aged twelve.

At Age	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
By Boys	1	2	6	18	14	16	23
By Girls	0	1	2	1	2	2	2

There could be no clearer indication of the boys' latent yearning for independence than their sudden admiration at the age of nine for characters who display these untamed and savage qualities, and in all the books they choose after this age the hero tends to be one who commands admiration by his exploits, by his self-assertion, and through domination over people or circumstances. It is otherwise with the girls. They, in contrast, are drawn more to characters who inspire sympathy or affection, who adapt themselves happily to circumstances and who conform successfully to the demands which others make upon them. This difference does not fully manifest itself until the final years of childhood, but at that stage, it would appear, the boys are far more impatient of conformity and acquiescence than are the girls, and far more anxious to assert their independence and their personal prowess.

This probably underlies the admiration that boys give to characters in fiction who assert their mastery over machines - ships, motor-cars and aeroplanes. Stories such as those of W.E. Johns, in which the hero is the pilot of an aircraft, reach their peak of popularity with boys aged ten, but are almost equally enjoyed by boys of nine and twelve. More than ten per cent of the books chosen at these ages have as their chief character one who has this power to control a machine. Oddly enough, they form only six per cent of those borrowed by the boys aged eleven. Not for the first time, boys of this age reveal unexpected tastes in books, and it becomes increasingly evident that at the age of

eleven a number of new-comers join the Library, whose interest in reading is different in nature from that of boys who join earlier and remain longer.

More to the present point, however, is the fact that while the boys of junior school age are considerably attracted to heroes who are capable of handling these machines, the girls are quite indifferent to such forms of expertise. On the other hand they are rather more interested than the boys in characters who are able to control an animal, and especially a horse. Elkin¹ has pointed out that boys' enjoyment of Western films derives in part from the vicarious exercise of power over the cowboy hero's horse. But, he adds, the horse is also a pet, and as such may be both the object and the source of affection. While therefore boys and girls alike may enjoy reading stories in which characters display their control over animals, it may be that they do so for quite different reasons, the former to indulge their wish for power, the latter as an expression of their need for love.

Books in which main character displays mastery over animals as a percentage of all books borrowed.

At Age	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
By Boys	7	10	11	11	9	7	9
By Girls	9	9	11	14	13	13	14

As the above table shows, admiration for characters who possess this quality tends to wane among the boys after the age of nine, but among the girls it is strongest in the later years of childhood.

1. Elkin, Frederick: 1950. Page 80.

The Pony story enters upon the stage of its highest popularity among the girls at the age of nine, the point at which stories of adventure in the air, on sea and in space are beginning to oust the Western out of favour with the boys. Unquestionably the possession of a horse symbolises quite different aspirations for the boy in the early years of childhood and the girl at the onset of adolescence. This aptly illustrates a vital principle concerning the relationship between the reader and the book. It is in keeping with what we know of the selective nature of the processes of perception and retention that each reader should, so to speak, re-write for himself each book he reads, extracting from it, or even if need be adding to it, according to his own requirements. It is not necessary to suppose that the boy who enjoys cowboy stories is fond of horses or wishes to become a cowboy; all we can safely say is that for him the cowboy and the horse prove apt symbols of important personal needs and aspirations, and that precisely what these are is seldom immediately apparent.

We cannot say then what inner meaning a book may hold for a given reader, nor that its inner meaning will be the same for every child. On the contrary, we may be sure that for each reader the book will serve as a metaphor which each will interpret for himself. Common to most children, however, is the ambition to grow up, and there are clear indications that this preoccupation is reflected in their choice of reading matter, and above all in their tendency to identify themselves with fictitious characters somewhat older than themselves. There is no blue-print within the child which

dictates how he must grow. Human beings have within themselves the capacity to develop in a wide variety of ways, to become primitive savages proudly hunting heads, or Christian gentlemen delighting in good works. Essential to the process of growing up is the task of discovering the range of possible identities permitted to us, and of choosing our own identity within that range. Children take pleasure in endless questioning, in imitating, in play-acting, in day-dreaming and in reading - all of them activities which in one way or another help them to find answers to two insistent questions: What is it like to be a human being? What sort of human being shall I be?

The folk tales current among different tribes of American Indians have been shown to advertise the traits of personality honoured in respective cultures.¹ The early training of a Navajo child, for instance, lays stress upon independence, self-assertion and competitive achievement, and Navajo folk-tales reflect the social value placed upon these attributes. In contrast, the traditional stories of the Flatheads lay little stress upon these qualities, which their easy-going mode of living and their indulgent methods of child-rearing do nothing to encourage. Like these primitive folk-tales, modern children's stories uphold values which are sanctioned by the culture from which they spring, and like them play a part in disseminating the standards current in the society

1. McClelland, David C., and Friedman, G.A. 1952.

to which their audiences belong. As befits the complexity of our society, however, the code postulated in children's books is far less unified and self-consistent than that expounded in the lore of a primitive tribe. Specialisation and differentiation of functions according to age, sex, class, occupation and the like, have led to the formulation in our society of a variety of codes, often mutually contradictory, but each relevant to one or other of the many roles the individual may be called upon to fill. If one common precept does emerge from the many principles of conduct severally urged by all these children's books, it is the importance of being acceptable to a group, whether it be the family, the gang, or the community, and of shaping one's attitudes and conduct to ensure one's acceptance.

Though its author may not intend it to be such, a book for children is in a sense a parable prescribing certain attitudes, values and actions as means to the achieving of certain goals. These goals are seen in terms of status, as positions of prestige in a given social context. The story has a happy ending: the hero's right to the status he desires is confirmed, and the role he plays in order to achieve this end is vindicated. Like the folk tale in primitive societies, the modern children's story gives public sanction to certain aims and motivations, and sets a seal on certain means to their fulfilment. For this reason, the books he reads are powerful among the influences which go to shape the child's

conception of his goals and of the adjustments he must make in order to attain them. As he grows, the child's idea of his own potentialities and purposes undergoes inevitable change, which his reading itself may help to bring about. His changing ideals are reflected in his reading tastes. In his progress towards maturity, self-understanding, and a fuller and more realistic appraisal of his place and functions in the world, the heroes to whom he gives allegiance are successively more mature and more obviously human in their motives and their pattern of behaviour. The centre of the stage is occupied in turn by the child whose amiability wins recognition in the home, the boy or girl whose loyalty and boldness are valued by their companions, the youngster whose qualities find favour with grown-ups of the same sex, and finally the adolescent or adult accorded a full place in the community at large.

The reader picks a book in which the hero plays a role to which he himself aspires. More often than not, the hero is older than the reader himself, and achieves a higher status than he himself has yet gained. By identifying himself with such a figure, the reader acquires vicarious experience of a role which he anticipates his coming life will call on him to play. His reading is an imaginative rehearsal of his future adaptations. Each of the books he chooses presents him with a model for his imitation; he accepts the model as appropriate if the status and achievement which it promises are such as he himself would like to claim, and therefore he will tend to select books which

crystallise this image of his ideal self until developments in his external life render it inadequate or obsolete. He gives his admiration to the hero who in fiction successfully overcomes the obstacles which frustrate his own development in real life, and in his hero's consistent triumph over difficulties he looks for clues to his own unresolved problems. His chosen heroes therefore provide us with an index to the reader's emotional maturity: too protracted an interest in heroes of one kind would lead us to suspect that some serious obstacle is hindering his emotional development, and in such an instance it might afford us some insight into the nature of his problem to look at the kinds of difficulties with which his heroes are continually wrestling. Prolonged frustration in real life may well induce the reader to regress to forms of reading more appropriate to children younger than himself, and to substitute for the satisfactions denied him in reality the satisfaction of identifying himself with a successful character in fiction.

In any case, there is a certain ambivalence in the reader's attitude towards the hero he professedly admires. To admire a real person might entail an acceptance of his own inferiority; to admire a fictitious character involves no such self-abasement. The pleasure he derives from sharing in a fictitious hero's triumph is all the keener because he knows himself to be real, and therefore superior to the fictional creation. Undoubtedly, this awareness of their superiority enhances the pleasure which young children have in following the exploits of animals and

toys. In two-thirds of the books selected by the boys aged six, there is no human character with whom the reader can identify himself. This is not to say that he does not see himself in the role played by the animal or toy; on the contrary, he does so the more readily because he knows himself superior to the creatures in the book, and less vulnerable than they. It has been suggested¹ that children who are afraid of some object often like that object more than any other when it is presented in miniature form or as a toy, and that by means of these symbols they can sometimes overcome difficulties that are otherwise beyond control. In much the same way, through his reading the child fortifies himself against fear, failure and inadequacy, by taking to himself the triumphs of a being demonstrably inferior to himself. The boys by the age of nine, and the girls a little later, are able to dispense with the more patently unreal of these devices. Thereafter the chief characters in the books they choose are almost always human beings, but although the figures are no longer so obviously puppets, these older readers find no difficulty in distinguishing between them and real people. The capacity to make this distinction is necessary for the reader's enjoyment of stories. It enables him at will to identify himself with,

1. Griffiths, D.C. (1932) Page 164.

or dissociate himself from, the character presented in the story. This is most necessary, perhaps, when the fictional being is involved in situations intolerable to the reader in his own identity. For this reason, when the younger readers choose a book in which the main character is faced with serious hazards - with being lost, kidnapped, or injured - the book is almost always one in which the character so threatened is a puppet figure. On the other hand, even the youngest readers are prepared to read about a human being whose situation is entirely free from risk. More sophisticated readers are always able to maintain the requisite degree of aloofness towards characters in fiction, however human their guise and however dangerous their plight.

Looking then at the heroes and heroines he chooses to read about, we are justified in regarding a child's leisure reading as part of his effort to assimilate the attitudes and values which pertain to the role and status appropriate to his age, sex and social situation. At different stages in his biological growth, he is under pressure to abandon modes of conduct stigmatised as immature, and to assume a more mature role. He is aware of the superior status of those older than himself, and covetous of the increased freedom and power they appear to enjoy. Pressures, therefore, both within and without, thrust him forward through successive phases in his social growth, and, to judge from the changes discernible in children's reading tastes between the ages of six and twelve, this process of social adaptation is marked by three fairly clear stages. Until the age of seven or eight,

their chief concern is to explore the requirements of the role imposed on them as young, dependent, powerless members of a family essentially controlled by adults. At this stage, the wider community is regarded either as hostile, and therefore to be shunned, or simply as an extended family in which the code which operated within the home is equally valid. Later, until the age of eleven or twelve, their reading indicates their main concern to be to understand, and to equip themselves to meet, the expectations of their peers. They learn to recognise the norms culturally prescribed as fitting to their age and sex, and become aware of the sometimes conflicting demands of friends and adults. Finally, at the approach of adolescence, their reading shows them attempting to anticipate the adjustments which entry into adult life will require of them.

Between successive phases there is a period of transition attended on the one hand by eagerness to reach out for the wider privileges of the new condition, and on the other by fears of failure and inadequacy. In order to resolve this dilemma, a child may resort to day-dreaming or to reading. Fantasy, it has been said,¹ is at once the necessary preparation for action and the means of delaying it, and at least at these transitional periods in a child's life, reading performs very

1. Griffiths (1932) p. 292.

similar functions. Books offer the young reader a wide variety of identities to be assumed at will, and thus present him with the means of exercise in roles which inner promptings and social pressures both urge him to accept. At the same time, the vicarious satisfactions he achieves in his assumed identify serve to compensate him for the frustration that attends his failure to make the requisite adjustment in reality. Clearly, therefore, while his reading may form a useful part of the child's preparation for a forward step in his social and emotional development, too protracted an interest in heroes or heroines of one kind may be a sign of his evading the task of growing up.

CHAPTER VI

Fantasy, Romance and Realism

We have seen that for children reading can be the means of self-realisation: through playing a variety of roles, they become more fully aware of their true needs and desires, potentialities and limitations. But apart from helping the child to discover his own identity, it is obvious that reading performs other functions in his life, and above all that of enabling him to explore, and come to terms with, his external environment. This is not to say that children, any more than adults, always read with conscious purpose. Sometimes, of course, and especially when we read works of information - history, geography, travel, science - it is with the express aim of extending our knowledge of the world and of bringing order and significance to what we know; but when reading fiction, for example, we may not be aware that the underlying purpose of our reading is to bring within our compass as much experience as possible, and to render that experience intelligible to ourselves. Our need to move with confidence and safety in the world around drives us to discern rhythm, pattern and logic in the phenomena we observe in nature and society. What renders the world as it is portrayed in books attractive to us is precisely that it has such rhythm, pattern and logic, imposed by art upon reality. In the same way, part of the appeal which such tales as 'The Three Bears' have for the very young lies in their recurrent pattern, and if, as often happens, children resent the

slightest change even to the wording of these stories, it is because such changes threaten the predictability, the inevitable order, which is the charm of the story-book world.

It will help us, therefore, to understand the changes that overtake children's reading as they grow, if we regard their reading as part of an attempt to comprehend their physical and social environment. This obviously does not mean that the only books a child will read are those which deal with matters within his personal experience. Beyond the field of which he has immediate knowledge he is aware, from hints, reports and portents, of another world into which sooner or later he will be called upon to fare. His imagination is engaged in formulating an image of that world and in rehearsing the adjustments that he may have to make. His reading serves as an auxiliary to his imagination: of both he requires that they should help him to fore-arm for the encounters he expects to make. Some of the books he reads will deal with the world with which he is familiar and his interest in them stems from his need to comprehend his own experience; other books he reads because they afford him insight into unknown worlds, strange experiences and new problems.

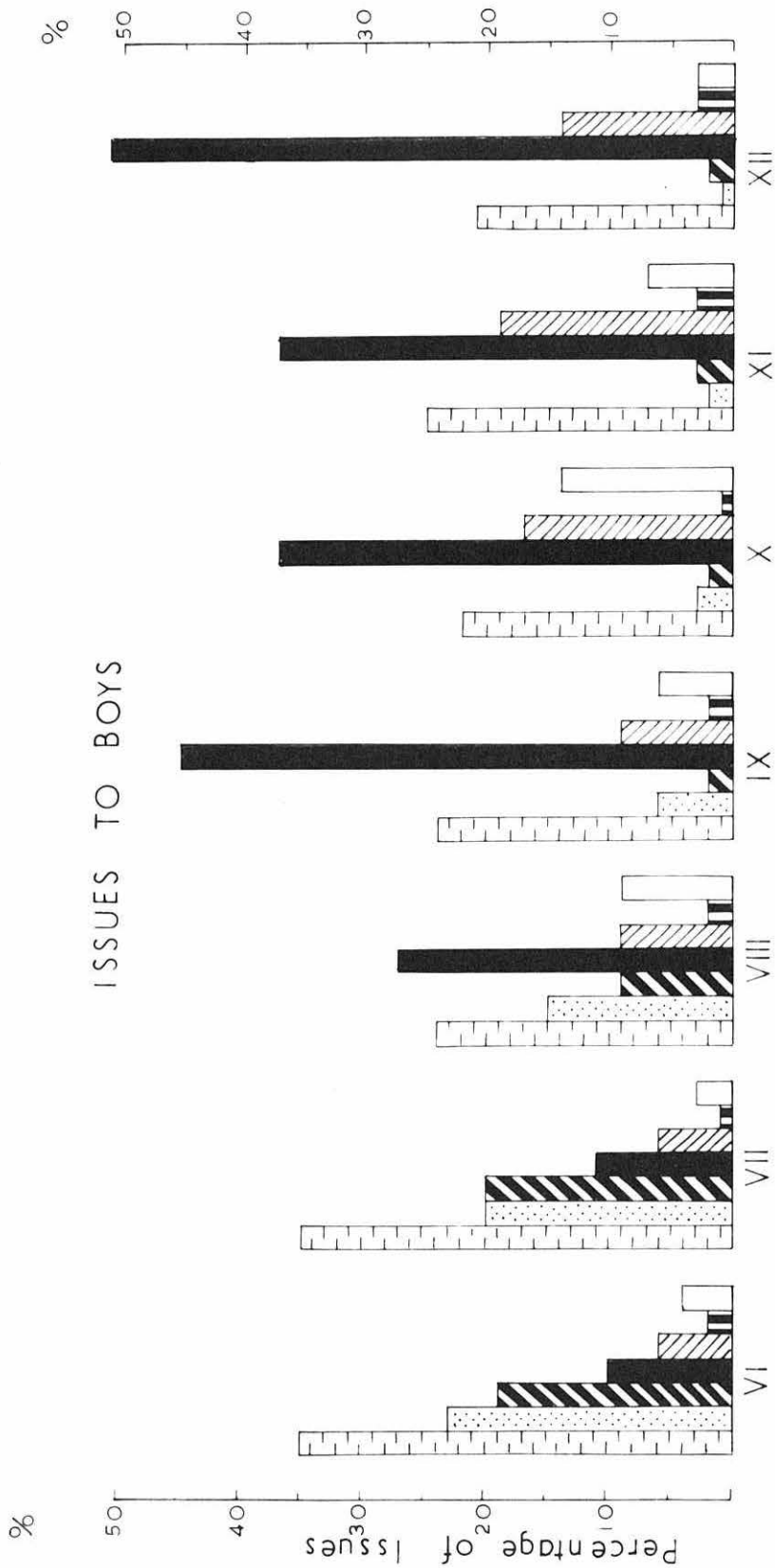
As we have observed, in the process of growing, readers tend to identify themselves with characters of their own age or somewhat older. We noticed, too, that the social milieu they explore through their reading tends to widen as they grow: in turn the family, the peer group, the adult world attract their attention. In much the same way they may be seen to extend, through their reading, their

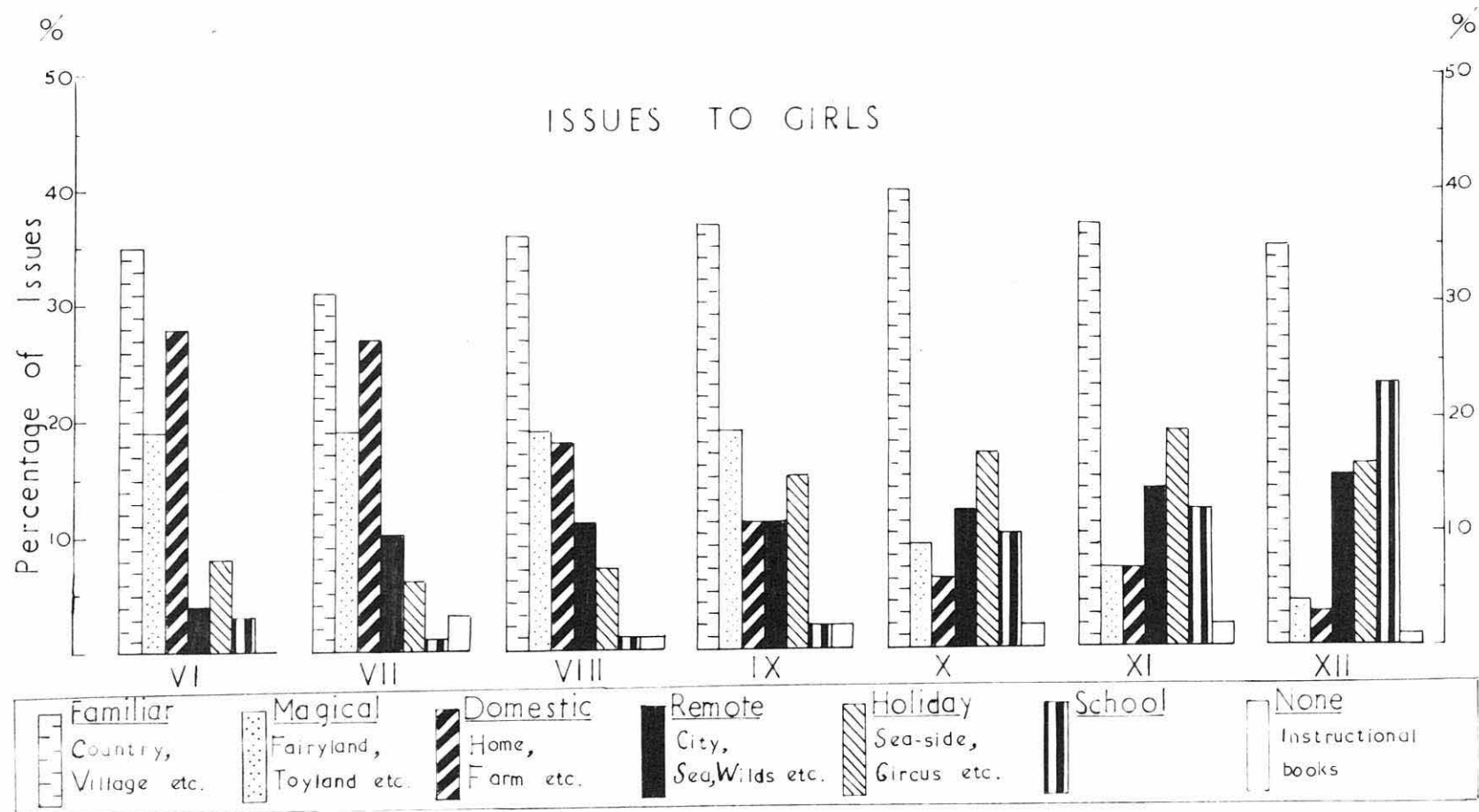
understanding of their physical surroundings. Not only through the books they read on science or on practical subjects, but also through their stories, they push ever further back their geographical horizons.

Of course, not every book has a precise setting: books on stamp-collecting or engineering, for example, though obviously concerning with explaining the external world, may have no exact location; moreover, many of the stories read in early childhood are not set in the real world at all, but in a world of the imagination, in a fairyland or wonderland having little or no resemblance to the world in which the reader as a human being is obliged to live. As readers grow older, however, they tend increasingly to abandon stories with fantastic backgrounds, and to seek books which are set in one area or another of the real world. At the age of six, as is shown in Figure 8, roughly a quarter of the books chosen by these boys and girls are set in fairyland, but by the age of nine, such stories have almost disappeared from among those chosen by the boys, and though the girls continue to read them somewhat longer, by the age of eleven they too have almost completely abandoned them in favour of books with settings which form part of the real world.

There are other obvious trends. At the age of six, the domestic scene - the nursery, home or farm - and the familiar countryside form the background to the bulk of the stories read. These fall out of favour in later years, quite rapidly among the boys after the age of eight, later and more slowly among the girls. As they decline, stories set in villages or small towns rise in popularity, to reach their peak with readers ten or eleven years

FIGURE 8
ANALYSIS OF ISSUES ACCORDING TO SETTING





old. With these come stories located in surroundings associated with holidays - at the sea-side, on rivers, in castles and caves, or at the circus. These too appeal most to the ten- and eleven-year-olds, and thereafter start to wane. Among the girls, from about the age of ten, stories with a school setting grow rapidly more popular until they comprise more than a fifth of those borrowed by the girls aged twelve. At no time, however, do they have more than a slight appeal for the boys. Increasingly after the age of eight, their tastes turn towards stories set in the wilds, on sea, in the air, or in outer space. Stories of this kind, which transport their readers to worlds outside the confines of their every-day experience, account for two-fifths of those chosen by the boys aged twelve.

It is clear from Figure 8 that the books which children choose are of two kinds - those which deal with surroundings with which the readers are themselves familiar, and those which present an unfamiliar world, whether it be a world of fantasy or merely some remote or exotic part of the real world. Through their reading, therefore, children either investigate and render comprehensible to themselves their immediate environment, or in imagination probe beyond, leaving behind what is immediate and familiar, and thrusting forward to what is remote and unknown.

It may clarify for us the underlying motives of this imaginative reconnaissance to look again at the rise in popularity of stories with a school background. The great majority of these deal with

secondary schools. They are rarely read before the age of ten, but at that age, shortly before they themselves embark upon the secondary stage of their school careers, the girls suddenly begin to read them in considerable numbers. Plainly, therefore, at this stage their readers regard them as offering some sort of preview of the world into which they expect shortly to be plunged. However, these stories retain their popularity among the girls in their first year at the secondary school and even longer. Now, obviously, they serve a somewhat different purpose, that of enabling their readers to comprehend the new environment, to understand its structure and its laws.

What is true of their stories is also true of the works of information they enjoy. Sheena Morey's 'Old MacDonald's Farm', a simple account of life on a farm, with coloured illustrations of farm animals, is typical of the non-fiction which appeals to the very young. The amount of factual information in such books is usually slight; their main aim is less to instruct than to give expression to their readers' desire to move freely in the world outside the home. Somewhat older readers enjoy 'Out with Romany by Meadow and Stream' by G.B. Evens, or 'Adventures with the Zoo Man' by David Seth-Smith, while at about the age of nine children come to appreciate such books as 'Animal Life in the East' by F.M. and L.J. Duncan.

This survey of the geography, as we may call it, of children's books illustrates certain of the functions which readers,

consciously or otherwise, expect their books to serve: that of rendering the familiar comprehensible, and that of introducing, and allaying their anxieties with regard to, the unknown. When we come to look at their themes - the subjects they treat and the incidents they relate - it is again clear that children are concerned on the one hand with matters within their own experience, and on the other with those beyond their actual, but within their fore-seeable, experience. A story of romantic love, however simply told, will fail to hold the reader who is too young to envisage himself in that predicament, whereas an account of children in their dealings with their parents may gain his attention because it has some relevance to his own emotional preoccupations. At the other end of the scale, the girl of twelve is no longer mainly preoccupied with her relations with her parents; rather is she involved in situations with her age-mates, though already she feels the first stirrings of an interest in the opposite sex. At this stage she may no longer read the simple Family story, but may not be indifferent to a tale of love.

In effect, a child's choice of themes and subjects keeps pace with his emotional development. This follows naturally from what was observed in the last chapter of the tendency on the part of readers to identify themselves with progressively older characters. It emerges, too, from the account given in Chapter III of the kinds of books they are prone to select at various stages, when it was shown how in the estimation of the girls, for instance, the Puppet Story is supplanted by the

Fairy Story, and this in turn gives way to School and Mystery Stories, which will themselves ultimately be ousted by the Careers Story and the Adolescent Novel. The trend is clearly towards books which deal with adult rather than childish situations, problems and experiences. The fact that death by violence occurs in only two percent of the books borrowed by the boys aged six, but in 38 percent of those read at the age of twelve points in the same direction. Yet another indication is the fact that love or marriage is described in only three per cent of the books chosen by the girls of eight, but in eleven per cent of those read by the girls of twelve.

The image of the world with which children are presented in their books can never be completely faithful to reality. An author may, indeed, intend an accurate portrayal of the external world, but the whole truth is beyond his compass, and the need to select his material itself entails a certain falsity of emphasis, and its arrangement imposes some measure of stylization and convention. Nevertheless, a valid distinction can be made between a work which deserves to be called realistic, in that it contains nothing but the truth, though not the whole truth, and the work of fantasy, in which the author deliberately presents objects or incidents such as do not observably occur in real life. The fact that a story, in certain of its aspects, is at odds with reality does not preclude it from having an underlying fidelity to the truth of human experience. An element of fantasy in the portrayal of character, background and incident may yet be consonant with a genuine attempt to describe

authentic motives, values and relationships. The rabbit dressed in human clothes, in a situation which is admittedly incongruous, may nevertheless behave in a completely self-consistent fashion, and serve to illustrate a valid conception of human existence. Another distinction needs to be made: between the realistic and the fantastic stand the romantic picture. In this the separate ingredients are all derived from observable reality, but so selected, and thrown into such high relief as seriously to mis-represent the pattern of normal experience. The common-place and the familiar are ignored, or relegated to a place of no importance; the novel and extraordinary are elevated to a prominence out of all proportion to their incidence in real life.

Defined in these terms, Fantasy includes Puppet Stories and Fairy Stories, since quite evidently their characters and many of their incidents are such as are never met in nature. Romance takes in Mystery and Adventure stories, since these may be said to distort by false emphasis things which can and do exist in reality. Mystery and danger, for example, certainly form part of human experience, but their incidence in these stories is out of all proportion to their occurrence in every-day life. The category termed Realism may be further sub-divided into Juvenile Realism on the one hand and Adult Realism on the other. The former comprises School Stories, Gang Stories and Pony Stories, all of which attempt a faithful portrayal of children in their relationships with other children; the latter includes Family

Stories, Careers Stories and Adolescent Novels, all of which try to present an authentic picture of young people in their dealings with the grown-up world.

To look again at Figure 5¹ is to see that the changes which overtake children's reading tastes as they grow older follow a clear and developing pattern. The Fantasy which dominates their reading at the age of six slowly yields to Romance and Realism, to disappear from the boys' repertory after the age of nine, though still present among the girls' choices at the age of twelve. Juvenile Realism, represented by the Gang Story, makes its appearance among the boys' books at the age of six, to gain ground gradually and very slowly throughout the ensuing years. It appears slightly later among the girls' selections, but develops much more rapidly, especially after the age of nine, until by the age of twelve it accounts for one-third of all their reading. Romance, in the form of the Adventure Story, enters the boys' reading programme at the age of seven, and soon threatens to oust all other form of reading, since by the age of eleven the Mystery Story and the Adventure Story together account for four-fifths of all the books borrowed. Once again the girls lag a little behind the boys; Mystery Stories are first borrowed in appreciable numbers at the age of eight, but they quickly rise in popularity, until

1. Chapter III, page 43.

at the age of twelve the Mystery Story and the Adventure Story account for a further third of all the books borrowed, thus equalling stories of Juvenile Realism. Adult Realism, as represented by the Family Story, has a place in children's reading from the age of six. With the boys, however, it makes no headway, and after the age of eight is almost entirely neglected. It is otherwise with the girls; as they grow older they show increasing interest in this kind of story; more and more Family Stories are read, and to these are added at the age of eleven the Careers Story and the Adolescent Novel, so that more than one-fifth of the books they borrow at the age of twelve fall into this class.

At different stages in their search for a satisfying image of the world, children veer from one mode of presentation to another: from the Fantasy of the Puppet Story to the Realism of the School Story, from the Romance of the Mystery to the Adult Realism of the Careers story. Fantasy, Juvenile Realism, Romance and Adult Realism, in that order, are the successive steps in their progress towards mature reading tastes.

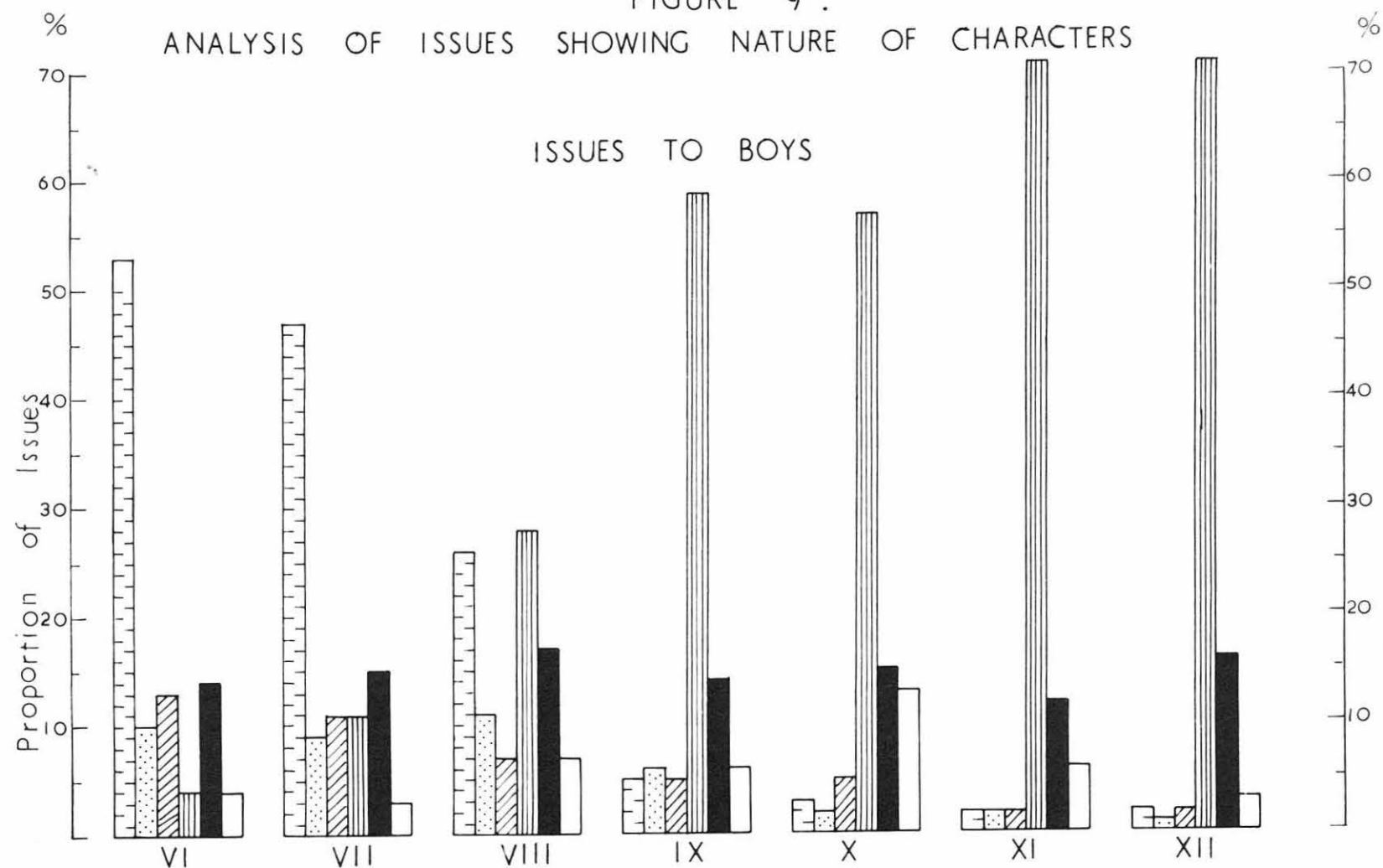
This tendency for older children to demand a greater degree of realism is evidenced in various ways. They expect their authors to be more realistic, for example, in the portrayal of their characters. An attempt is made, in Figure 9, to show how children's tastes change in this respect from year to year. Certain of the books they read, books of poetry and works of information, contain no living characters; certain others, it

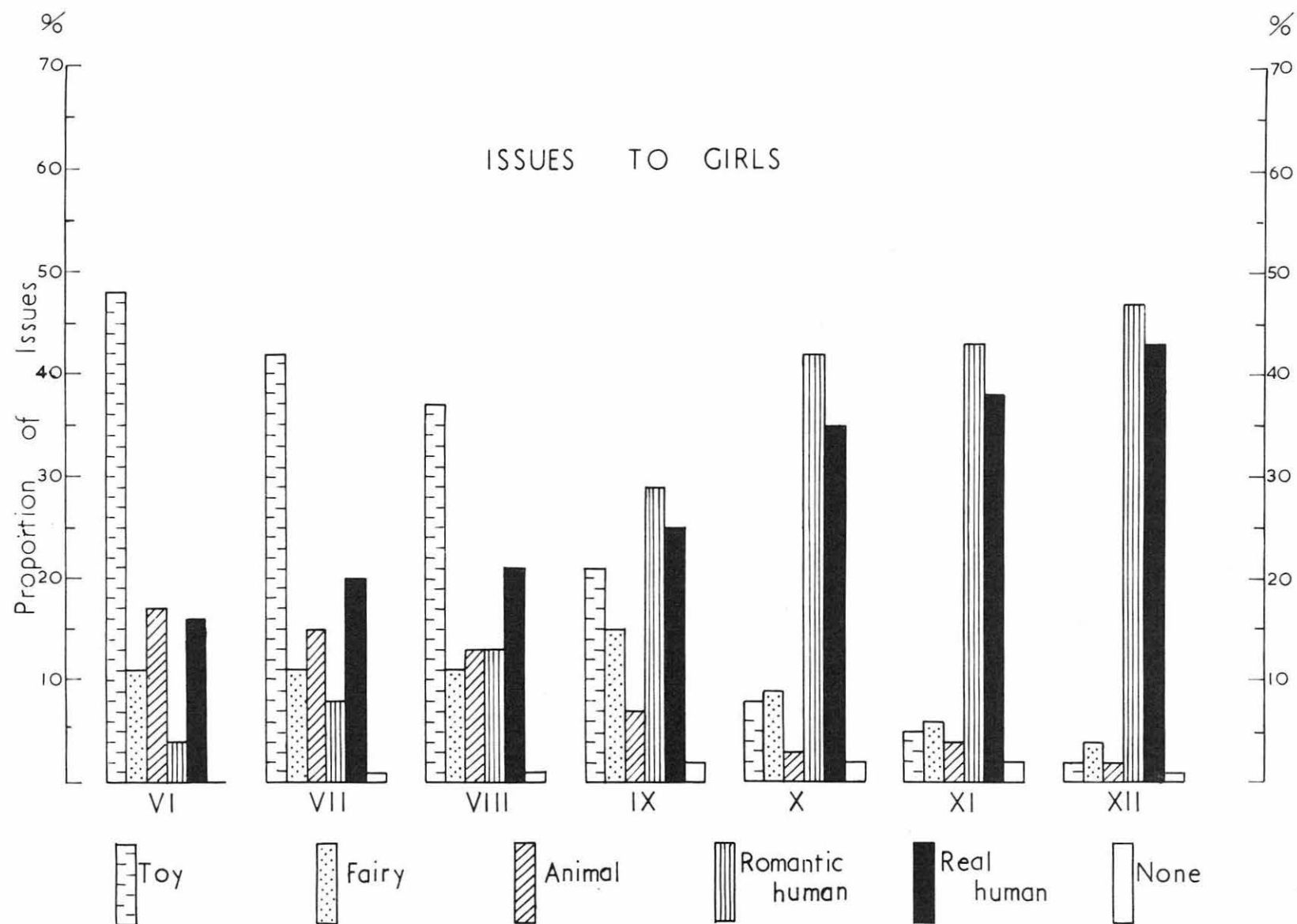
will be remembered, were not examined, because none had been borrowed by more than one reader. The remainder are classified according to the nature of the characters they describe. In the first place we have books peopled by creatures of fantasy - puppets, humanised animals, fairies and magical beings. It often happens that one or more of the characters in such a book is an ordinary child, who may well be the central figure, but if the society which the book describes is made up of toys or fairies, then the book is allocated to this class. A second group comprises books which deal with a world of real animals; Jack London's 'Call of the Wild', Anna Sewell's 'Black Beauty', and René Guillot's 'Sama' are well-known examples. Next come books containing human characters described in romantic terms. Mystery and Adventure stories obviously form the bulk of those which come within this category, but occasionally in works of non-fiction dealing with historical events, travel or exploration the characters are of heroic stature, or otherwise endowed with qualities and characteristics rarely found in the people their readers encounter in their daily lives. This is the criterion which distinguishes these from the realistic human characters who commonly, though not invariably, appear in School Stories, Family Stories and Careers Stories.

It will be seen from Figure 9 that books in which the characters are essentially figures of fantasy are enormously popular among the six-year-olds, but fall rapidly out of favour, especially after the age of nine or ten. As they decline, books

FIGURE 9 .

ANALYSIS OF ISSUES SHOWING NATURE OF CHARACTERS





in which the characters are portrayed in romantic guises are borrowed in increasing numbers. At the same time, there is a tendency, particularly among the girls, for readers to borrow as they grow older more and more books dealing with realistic characters. Books describing the world of real animals never enjoy more than a moderate popularity, and their numbers dwindle as the children grow older. The books which children borrow at the age of six are unequally divided between those whose characters are creatures of fantasy and those containing realistic human beings; at the age of twelve, their books are again of two kinds: those with romantic, and those with realistic, human characters. In the intervening years romance gradually replaces fantasy in the books these children borrow.

It was said earlier that the order of progression in children's reading is from Fantasy to Juvenile Realism, thence to Romance, and finally to Adult Realism. This, however, over-simplifies the process. The transition from one phase to another is never abrupt or clear-cut, either in the development of children as a whole or in the history of any individual. To illustrate this, one need only point to the range and variety among the books borrowed by the girls of twelve. It would not be difficult, either, to point to individual readers who borrow from the Library a Careers Story one week and a Mystery Story the next. When choosing a book, the reader may have one of a number of purposes in mind, and it is his purpose for reading which determines his choice of subject, and, more specifically, the sort of treatment he expects the subject to be given. He may choose a book about Red

Indians, for example, for purposes of information or entertainment. If the former is his aim, however, he is likely to look for a much more realistic treatment of Red Indians than when reading for pure pleasure. In other words, whether a child chooses a work of Fantasy, Romance, or Realism depends upon the purposes for which he reads.

To illustrate the role played by Fantasy in children's reading, it may be as well to take a close look at a story typical of many of those borrowed by the six-year-olds. In Beatrix Potter's 'Tale of Samuel Whiskers', little Tommy Kitten mischievously hides from his mother, only to be captured by Samuel Whiskers the rat, who with his wife decides to make him into kitten dumpling. They steal the necessary butter, dough and rolling-pin, and have already encased him in dough when Tommy's mother brings the farmer to the rescue. Tommy is restored to the safety of his home, while the two rats are forced to decamp in haste to another farm. Clearly implied, though not overtly stated, as it might have been in stories of an earlier day, is the moral that the home and the community are places of security and happiness for those who obey the appropriate rules of conduct. It may be questioned, however, whether the young reader is so much concerned to learn such salutary lessons as to overcome in imagination the apprehensions which prevent him from making similar experiments in real life. Here, the deliberate absence of realism serves to guard the reader against too close and unpleasant an involvement with the characters and their predicament. Fantasy, that is to say, here serves the purpose of allaying the reader's fears and anxieties.

The need for such protective mechanisms is strongest when the story involves the characters in hazards, physical or emotional. The threat of danger is fairly common in these stories, but is rarely realized. Violent death occurs, as we have said, in only two per cent of the stories borrowed at the age of six. Even when, as is more frequently the case, the threat is to the happiness and emotional security of the characters, the outcome of the story is invariably happy. In many, the part of 'deus ex machina' is played by parents or other adults, but in others, as in the fairy-tales which are often among the most harrowing of the stories read by children at this early age, a happy issue is brought about by magic. One facet of children's addiction to fantasy at this time is their fondness for stories with some element of magic. Miraculous events occur in nearly a quarter of the books borrowed at the age of six. Afterwards, the boys borrow fewer and fewer of these stories every year, until by the age of twelve they are seldom borrowed by the boys; the girls, however, read them in increasing numbers until the age of nine, but by the age of twelve the girls read them almost as rarely as the boys.

Beatrix Potter's 'Tale of Samuel Whiskers' is fairly representative of the works of fantasy enjoyed by boys and girls aged six. In the great majority of the books they read at this age there is a deliberate absence of realism in the setting of the story, in the beings who inhabit it, or in the happenings which are described. A substantial minority of the books read at this age, however, are of a different

kind. These belong for the most part to the category of the Family Story, and describe in reasonably credible and realistic terms the activities of an ordinary child in or near the home. Sheena Morey's 'Old MacDonald's Farm', outlined earlier in this chapter, is typical of these. It differs from Beatrix Potter's story not only in being more realistic but also because its atmosphere is untroubled and serene. Even more important is the fact that it deals with matters within the range of its readers' own experience.

Until the age of eight or nine, children's choices among books are divided between those which deal in fairly realistic terms with subjects closely related to their own experience, and those which deal in the idiom of fantasy with situations of a kind they have not yet encountered in their daily life. Before entering school, a child's first-hand experience is extremely narrow; nearly all the things he reads about will be unfamiliar to him. In consequence, the only realistic books he reads will tend to be those which deal with the home life of a young child. Frances Ingersoll's 'Peter gets his wish' is an example of this kind of story, and is often read by five-year-olds. At this age, however, children tend to read about remote school-life in Puppet Stories such as Jane Pilgrim's 'Ernest Owl starts a school', or Rodney Bennett's 'Little Miss Pink's School', or Irma Wilde's 'The giraffe who went to school'. At the age of six or seven, they are prepared for more realistic accounts of school experience, such as Enid Blyton's 'Benjy and the others', or Kathryn and Byron Jackson's 'Jerry at school', but are still prone to choose Aesopian stories such as Lillian Miozzi's 'The Adventures

of Tommy, the cat who went to sea' when they wish to read about the world beyond.

A dialectical progression, therefore, seems to underlie this vacillation between fantasy and realism. Before the age of eight or nine, the reader makes his first approach to fields of unfamiliar experience by the avenue of fantasy; he gradually acquires confidence for a more direct approach by way of realism to the zone thus reconnoitred, and in the meantime probes still further afield by means of fantasy. It is true, of course, that except within a limited sphere of his own experience, the young reader has no criteria by which to judge of the veracity or otherwise of the accounts given to him in books, but it is also true that he is prepared to accept, or even to prefer, a high degree of obvious artifice in the treatment of unfamiliar subjects. It may be supposed that in the first place this adds to his immunity, and in the second it affords him more freedom to mould the fictional experience to his own requirements. The reader is no passive recipient of the image impressed on him by books: he is unconsciously engaged in selecting and re-shaping it to his own needs. And the symbolic figure, the caricature or cartoon, is often preferred because it lends itself more easily to imaginative re-interpretation than does the rigidly realistic figure. For much the same reasons, young children often prefer to play with an undistinguished piece of wood rather than with the elaborate and expensive toy.

For the boys, their eighth year is clearly a period of

transition between the reading interests of childhood and those of boyhood. Even before this age, their reading has come to reflect a certain impatience with the limitations imposed upon their freedom, a certain longing for power and independence, a temptation to flout the rules of social and domestic life, and a desire to cock a snook at common-sense itself. Before the age of eight, however, it is through the medium of fantasy that the boys give vent to this spirit of rebellion. The stories of Muffin the Mule by Ann Hogarth and Annette Mills, which are less difficult to read but otherwise not unlike the Pooh tales of A.A. Milne, are fairly typical of those they choose at this stage. The central figure is a toy mule living with other toy animals in a world broadly modelled on the human world. Muffin is their leader and the acknowledged arbiter of life in this community. He has no family ties and is subject to no constraint. He possesses magical powers, and his actions, however eccentric or absurd, are accepted without question by the others. The humour that pervades these stories is derived from the parodying of adult orderliness, solemnity and rationality. From the age of eight onwards, however, the boys express their impatience of childish restrictions more and more through their reading of romance. Incidents connected with war, hazardous exploration, crime, capture and escape, death by violence, all appear much more frequently than hitherto in the books which they select, and there is a notable increase in the element of mystery. There is a corresponding decline in the place given in their stories to common-place events, to childish pursuits, and to domestic and social activities. The

change is reflected also in the tendency for boys of this age to choose stories set in exotic places - on the high seas, in the wilds, or in foreign cities - rather than in the prosaic surroundings of home, village or countryside. Interest in fantasy survives. Magical and irrational incidents occur as frequently as in the books chosen by the boys of seven. In turning to romance, it is not the fantastic that these readers are rejecting, but the common-place.

Another aspect of the change that comes about at this time is the sharp growth of interest in works of information, and especially in books of nature-study and wild life. At the age of eight, the boys borrow proportionately twice as many works of non-fiction as in the previous year, the majority of them scientific books, but almost equally as many dealing with hobbies and leisure-time activities, chiefly of an out-door nature. Interest is also high in subjects pertaining to engineering and mechanics, in locomotives, motor-cars, ships and air-craft, and for the first time biographies appear among the books selected by the boys.

By the age of nine the emergence from childhood into boyhood is virtually complete. Henceforward Fantasy has no place in the boys' reading; animated toys and animals have almost completely disappeared from their books, and stories of beings with magical or supernatural attributes are quite out of favour. Certain of the themes which hitherto have been prominent are no longer of great concern; not only are the books they choose less preoccupied with magical, fantastic and humorous incidents, but fewer of them are

concerned with family and social relationships. What is perhaps most characteristic of the nine-year-old boys is their fondness for tales of capture and escape, and these, together with other tales of violent adventure involving adult characters, grow increasingly popular in the following years, to eclipse even the Mystery Story by the age of twelve. Through his reading of such stories a boy gives vent to thwarted urges for independence, domination and aggression, but it is perhaps even more indicative of his desire for initiation to the world of men and for participation in men's experience. At the same time there is a great deal of covert curiosity about grown-up behaviour and its motives, and this finds an outlet chiefly in the reading of Mystery Stories. The remaining choices of boys at this stage fall upon Gang Stories on the one hand and works of information on the other. These seem to be part of a more realistic and practical attempt to widen the scope of their activities and experience, and to make effective adjustments to the outside world and to the other children who are now their principal companions.

Changes similar to those which occur among the boys at the age of eight take effect later and more gradually among the girls. From the age of nine their taste for Fantasy declines, and at the same time they borrow fewer books in which the action is confined to the limits of the home. They do not share the boys' taste for stories set at sea or in the wilds, but like them seem to expect of their stories an introduction to a wider world, free from adult domination.

School stories begin to be popular with the girls aged ten. Teachers play only a minor part in these stories, which deal for the most part with the activities of groups of girls ruled entirely by their prefects or their own appointed leaders and obedient to codes of conduct of their own devising. Not unexpectedly, tales of mischief, of youthful pranks in defiance of adult authority, enjoy considerable favour at this stage. From the age of nine onwards their reading interests suggest that the girls have a growing desire to free themselves from dependence upon adults, and look increasingly to their peers for satisfying personal relations, for approval and acceptance. This is reflected in their new liking for tales of sport, and especially of horse-riding. The Pony Stories widely read at this stage lay great stress upon the qualities which make a child acceptable, or give it status, in the group. At the same time, the underlying theme in many is the strong emotional relationship between its human owner and the horse. For the readers of these books, mastery over a horse serves as a symbol of emergence from dependent childhood into an age of freedom, responsibility and power. Moreover, their first yearning for some more uniquely personal relationship than is possible between members of a family finds expression in their liking for stories of deep love between a young person and an animal, usually a horse. Human love between the sexes does not appear prominently in the books selected by the ten-year-olds. The reading of Pony Stories is an indirect and guarded approach to that theme. The girls of this age are clearly aware of themselves as on the

threshold of adult life, and their curiosity about that way of life reflects itself obliquely in their intense interest in books containing an element of mystery. Nearly one-third of the books chosen by the girls aged ten relate the exploits of groups of youngsters investigating mysterious circumstances or trying to penetrate the secretive behaviour of grown-ups.

These are some of the new themes which increasingly occupy the girls from the age of nine. Other more obviously adult themes also make their appearance at this stage and play an increasingly prominent part in the girls' reading as they grow older. Although stories entirely devoted to romantic love are rarely among those they borrow, courtship, love and marriage play an incidental part in many of the Adolescent Novels and Careers Stories chosen by the older girls, the central themes of which turn upon an adolescent's experience of family life, of work, and of community relationships. It is here that the main differences lie between the reading interests of the boys and of the girls. Broadly speaking, the boys as they grow older are concerned to explore through their reading the material world, the world of sensory experience and of physical action. The girls, in contrast, are more concerned with the world of human beings, their mutual adjustments and relationships.

In one important respect, however, the development of the boys runs the same course as that of the girls. When at the age of eight or nine childhood is left behind, Fantasy is abandoned

for Romance. Once again the books chosen by these boys and girls fall into two broad classes; the realistic, dealing for the most part with people, places, activities and relationships of the kind with which readers of this age are occupied in real life; and the romantic, which express for them a vision of life beyond the limits of their own experience. Themes related to activities away from home, to school life, to youthful mischief, to the exploits of the gang, which readers have hitherto broached chiefly through the medium of fantasy, are now presented in straight-forward terms, while adult activities and relationships - work, the maintenance of law and order, leadership and loyalty - are tolerated only when invested with the glamour of romance in stories of adventure, outlawry and detection. The older girls advance beyond this stage when they begin to accept a more realistic treatment of these themes in their Careers Stories and Adolescent Novels, but before the age of thirteen few of the boys appear to be prepared to take this step.

Fantasy and Romance both appear therefore to be means whereby readers at different stages of development advance the frontiers of experience. They differ in that they give expression to two contrasted attitudes on the part of children towards the unknown. An individual's emotional response to the new and strange is in any case ambivalent. Curiosity vies with fear, and in the youngest, for whom security tends to be the prime concern, timidity predominates and dictates that all approaches to the unfamiliar should be made tentatively and with safeguards. Their preference for Fantasy is symptomatic of their reluctance to venture beyond the reassuringly

familiar. To older children the outside world, even that of which they have no immediate knowledge, is not so awesome and mysterious; on the contrary, they have come to regard the barriers between themselves and the unknown less as a means to their protection than as an irksome hindrance to their freedom. Their enthusiasm for Romance, the zest with which in fiction they encounter adventure, mystery and danger, bear witness to their boredom and frustration with the safe and the familiar.

If Fantasy and Romance are the forms in which readers at different stages prefer to encounter new experience, Realism is looked to to provide satisfying interpretations of what is already known. Works of non-fiction serve this purpose by classifying and explaining phenomena in the physical and material world; works of fiction do so by uncovering motives, relationships, causes and effects in the field of human behaviour. The taste for realism in fiction springs neither from anxiety nor frustration. Rather it arises from a much more practical desire on the part of the reader to comprehend the logic of his own experience and to make more effective adjustments to it.

What we have tried to emphasise is that a child's reading should not be regarded in isolation, but as part of his total effort to cope with his circumstances. At each stage of his growth, the child is involved in new relationships, meets new emotional problems, fresh difficulties of adjustment. At the age of six, for instance, he is concerned with finding freedom with security in the narrow circle of his home; at nine he is torn between obedience to his

elders and allegiance to his peers; at twelve he is anxious to learn how to make himself acceptable to those grown-up men among whom soon he will have to work and find companionship. These and similar preoccupations appropriate to each age will be reflected in the books he reads. Thus among the books he chooses at the age of six will be 'Boo, the boy who didn't like the dark', 'Pookie in search of a home', and 'The little engine that ran away'. At nine, he joins Richmal Crompton's William in cocking a snook at the grown-ups who hedge him round. At twelve he identifies himself with the youthful heroes who prove their manhood in the stories of Eric Leyland and Percy F. Westerman.

For the healthy reader reading is a form of exploration. Beset by a problem in life, he sends forward his imagination into fiction to chart a way forward through the difficulties. His progress in life is one of ready adjustment to successive situations and to an ever-widening range of human relationships, and this is reflected in his reading by a similar steady progress from books dealing with childish problems of adjustment to the home, father, mother and brothers, to those which deal with man's concern with the great problems of life, death, love, pain and immortality. The problem when he first approaches it in books may be disguised in fantasy or romance. Gradually he comes to accept a greater degree of realism. Ideally this would lead to a more complete appraisal of the problem and to its ultimate solution in his daily life. The unhealthy reader, on the other hand, reads not on the advance but in retreat. Defeated by a problem in life he seeks

in books, not a solution to his difficulties, but a refuge from them. In his reading he never progresses beyond a given theme, he rests chiefly in the zone of romance, rarely sallies into realism, readily turns to fantasy and to books intended for younger readers.

The second point to be stressed follows naturally from this. Good reading is primarily, perhaps, but not entirely, a matter of 'good' books. A child should derive both pleasure and profit from his reading. The pleasure he gains from reading a book comes from the fact that it allows him to live vicariously a life at once richer and less confusing than his own. The profit will depend on whether it equips him to face his own life with increased confidence, self-control and understanding. This itself depends in part upon his reading in a critical, inquiring spirit, rather than in a passive or escapist fashion. In part, also, it depends upon some quality of truth within the books themselves, however incomplete, simplified or allegorical it be. In addition to all this, the books he reads must be the right books, books which illuminate his own predicament, and are appropriate to his stage of emotional development. Good reading, in short, is reading which helps the reader to mature.

CHAPTER VII

Members and Non-Members.

In the foregoing chapters we have studied voluntary reading as a continuous process in the lives of children. Knowing that the newly-born do not read at all, and knowing that among adults the reading of books is widespread, we have tried to trace the steps by which, in the intervening years, the habit takes hold and spreads. Our findings are recorded in Chapter II. We know also that the reading tastes of young children differ in important ways from those of older people. In other chapters we have tried to record the separate stage of the transformation that takes place between infancy and adolescence. We have observed these children as they grow become increasingly prepared to accept books which make ever greater demands upon their reading powers. We have traced their gradual abandonment of the themes of infancy and childhood, and their growing interest in situations and problems proper to adolescence and maturity. We have traced their progress from fantasy, through romance, towards that realism which adults generally demand.

Inevitably in all this we have directed our attention to central tendencies, to the averages, means and norms characteristic of children of a given age, and have tended to neglect the wide differences that separate one child from another of the same age, differences often greater than those between one age-group and another. We claim to have discerned certain patterns and sequences amid the

welter of choices that children make among books. The fact remains, however, that one child of ten borrows 165 books in a year while others of that age borrow none at all. Again, one girl of twelve is content to read stories of excursions into fairyland, while another chooses books in which the themes and the degree of realism with which the themes are treated would not be out of place in an adult novel.

Such variations are a matter of common observation, and if we have so far neglected them, it is because they are better understood when seen against the general trends from which they are deviations. In order to understand them we must ask ourselves why one reader should read so many more or fewer books than is usual among children of his age, why another should choose books markedly more or less difficult, much more or less mature in their themes, much more realistic or fantastic in their treatment. In the chapters which follow we shall try to find answers to these questions, and in order to do so, we shall focus our attention upon a much smaller group than hitherto, namely, upon the 369 children who at the time of the enquiry were in the last year of their primary, or the first year of their secondary, education. Their ages on May 1st of the school year in which their reading was recorded ranged from 10 years 6 months to 12 years 11 months.

We shall begin by trying to discover what distinguishes the 60 per cent who join the Library from the 40 per cent who do not.

One obvious factor is sex. As the following table shows, although the group as a whole is almost equally divided between the sexes, among the members of the Library the girls outnumber the boys in a ratio of three to two. The great majority of those who fail to join the Library are boys.

Members and Non-Members according to Sex.
In Percentages. N = 369.

	Boys	Girls	All
Members	24%	36%	60%
Non-Members	<u>26%</u>	<u>14%</u>	<u>40%</u>
	50%	50%	100
¹ Chi-Square = 23.4; P < .01			

This is roughly consonant with what we have seen to happen in every age-group other than at the age of nine, and accords, moreover, with what almost every observer of children's reading has noted, that girls are more given to reading than are boys. The simplest explanation for this is that the boys have many more other things to do than have the girls. Certainly in the

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1. A Chi-Square value may be regarded as a measure of the discrepancy between the frequencies observed and the frequencies expected. "P" expresses the probability of discrepancies of this magnitude occurring solely by chance. See Moroney (1956) p. 249 et seq. In the present instance, the high value of Chi-Square reflects the substantial differences between the boys and girls, while the low value of "P" indicates that these differences are highly unlikely to be due to chance.

provision of clubs and of facilities for out-door activities, boys in this country are much more fortunate than girls.¹ Again, as was suggested earlier, it may be that in some sections of society reading is regarded as an activity more appropriate to girls than to boys. This attitude, if indeed it exists, is likely to be more prevalent among the children of manual workers than of others, but it is the children of manual workers who form the majority. It is also possible that the books available are lacking in appeal for boys. If there is a shortage of books suitable for boys, it is not confined to this library, but must be general if it is to account for the fact that boys have almost everywhere been found to read less than girls. Whatever the initial causes of this state of affairs, it is all too likely that authors and publishers, in pursuit of the biggest markets, will tend to perpetuate it by providing books for girls rather than for boys. One further possible explanation deserves considering. There is a likelihood, as Ladd (1933)² suggests, that reading achievement and the amount of voluntary reading are positively correlated, and it has often been claimed that girls perform better in tests of reading ability

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1. In the United States, also, society seems to provide a much fuller set of activities to engage the interests of boys than of girls, with the result that there too far more girls than boys mention reading as one of their favourite leisure time activities. See, for instance, Coleman, James S. (1961), p. 369.
 2. Op. cit., p. 26. She reports a positive correlation of +.30 between number of books read and reading achievement, and concludes that reading ability is of greater importance than intelligence in determining the quantity of voluntary reading.

than do boys. On neither score, however, is the testimony unequivocal. Brearley (1949)¹, for instance, doubts whether reading habits are directly dependent upon reading skill, and, unlike Burt, Ballard, Fleming and others, Ladd, Vernon and McLaren fail to find any consistent differences between boys and girls in reading ability.² On balance, therefore, the most plausible explanations of the fact that the girls join the Library in greater numbers than the boys are those which take into account the unequal recreational facilities and opportunities, the possible dearth of books suitable for boys, and the cultural pressures which cause reading to be held in low esteem by boys.

The children who join the Library differ from the rest in another respect; they tend to be more successful in school work. As the following table shows, a considerably higher proportion of members than of non-members were either already admitted to the grammar school or qualified for admission in the following year. Roughly one in two of the members, but only one in three of the non-members, is of grammar school standard.

1. Page 180.

2. On this question, see McLaren (1950) and Clark (1958)

Members and Non-Members according to Educational Level.

In Percentages. N = 313.

Members, 187; Non-Members, 126.

	Members	Non-members	All
Grammar Standard	50%	29%	42%
Secondary Modern Standard	<u>50%</u>	<u>71%</u>	<u>58%</u>
	100	100	100
Chi-Square 13.96; P < .01			

This is not unexpected. All the available evidence goes to show that the more successful children read more than others.¹ This does not necessarily mean that voluntary reading, or more specifically membership of the library, makes for better performance at school, though this may well be true. The effects are probably reciprocal, success at school fostering an interest in reading, and the habit of voluntary reading having a beneficial effect upon school work. Conversely, failure to read outside school may affect adversely school performance, and lack of success at school tends to destroy all interest in books.

Of the 131 children who are already at the grammar school or who have qualified for admission, 94 (72%) are members of the

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1. In this country Jenkinson (1947) offers the most conclusive evidence on this score. For the U.S.A. see Lazar (1937); for New Zealand, Scott (1947).

Library, compared with 93 (51%) of the 182 children who are at, or about to enter, the secondary modern school. On this evidence, it is reasonable to suppose that there is a clear association between library membership and educational attainment. At the same time, however, the strength of this association is not the same for the boys as for the girls. Of the boys of grammar school standard, 64 per cent are members of the Library, compared with only 35 per cent of modern school boys; of the grammar school girls, 79 per cent are members, but so are 67 per cent of the modern school girls. The following table compares library membership among boys and girls in relation to their educational level.

Members and Non-members according to Educational Level.
Boys and Girls compared.

	N.	Boys		N.	Girls	
		Members %	Non-members %		Members %	Non-members %
Grammar	64	64	36	67	79	21
Sec. Modern	89	35	65	93	67	33
		Chi-Square P < .01	13.34			Chi-Square 3.17 Not Significant

Among the boys, therefore, library membership is significantly higher among those of grammar standard than among those of secondary modern standard, but among the girls the difference is not important. That is to say that a boy who is

unsuccessful in school work is unlikely to show an interest in the library, whereas a girl is as likely to be interested whether she does well at school or not. This may reflect a profound difference between boys and girls in their attitude to leisure reading. It seems to suggest that the boys tend to associate the library with the school, and to regard all forms of reading as to some extent related to school work. For the girl, on the other hand, the reading of library books seems to be an essentially recreational activity, quite unconnected with what they do at school. If this interpretation of the evidence is justified, it bears out a conclusion reached by Philpott (1953)¹ that the search for pleasure ranks higher as a motive for reading among girls than among boys.

The children who join the Library tend not only to do better at school but to have higher scores in tests of intelligence. This is only to be expected, since measured intelligence is known to correlate highly with educational attainment. Nevertheless, evidence from other quarters on the relationship between intelligence and the amount of voluntary reading does not all point in the same direction. The highest correlation (+.4) is that reported by Wollner (1949).² She also finds the customary correlation of between +.5 and +.6 between intelligence and reading ability, but emphasises that these correlations

1. Op. cit. page 122.

2. Op. cit. page 78. Among others finding positive correlations are Lipscomb (1931) and Ladd (1933).

admit the extreme deviations of the bright, able reader who does no leisure reading, and the ardent reader who is not bright and whose reading ability is low. At the other extreme, Mullett (1951)¹ finds no data to suggest that there is any association between intelligence and the volume of reading of books, comics or magazines. Most investigators report correlations between intelligence and voluntary reading which are positive but considerably smaller than between voluntary reading and educational attainment.

This is certainly the case in the present instance. While it is true that members of the Library tend to be recruited from the more intelligent, it is not so much this which marks them off from non-members as the fact that they tend to achieve higher standards of school work. In some respects, however, intelligence scores provide a better basis for comparisons, since they are not subject to local variations to the same extent as are measures of educational attainment. The following table classifies library members and others into those with scores, on a non-verbal test of intelligence,² of 101 or more, and those with scores of 100 or below.

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1. Op. cit. page 56. This investigation, however, is confined to 'C' stream grammar school boys.
 2. Daniel's 'Figure Reading Test'. Mean for the entire group 97.98; Standard Deviation 14.97. The mixed linguistic background of the group made it advisable to use a non-verbal test. The test used had the further merit of being applicable to a wide age-range, an advantage if, as is hoped, the present investigation is extended to include older children.

Members and Non-members according to Intelligence.
In Percentages. Members 181, Non-members 141,
Total 322.

	Members	Non-members	All
Above average	53%	37%	46%
Below average	<u>47%</u>	<u>63%</u>	<u>54%</u>
	100	100	100
Chi-Square 8.58; P < .01			

It may be seen that nearly two-thirds of those who do not join the Library are below average intelligence. Among the members, on the other hand, those of more than average intelligence slightly outnumber the less intelligent. To put it differently, the average intelligence of library members is 100.5, nearly three points higher than that of the entire group, and nearly six points higher than the average of those who do not join.

These differences are not very great, but they point clearly to the fact that the more intelligent the child, the more likely he or she is to be attracted to the Library. This emerges unmistakably from the following table, which shows that the percentage of children joining the Library declines steadily as the level of intelligence declines.

Percentage of Library Members at each level of Intelligence.

IQ		61+	71+	81+	91+	101+	111+	121+
Percentage joining library	Boys	0	33	32	42	48	56	67
	Girls	50	69	64	63	73	79	80

In intelligence as in educational attainment, the differences between those who join the Library and those who do not are more pronounced among the boys than among the girls. The Library succeeds in attracting a relatively high proportion of the girls of very low intelligence. One of the two girls whose score is less than 70 is a member, together with nine of the thirteen with scores between 71 and 80. In contrast, none of the five boys with scores of 70 or below is a member, and only four of the twelve in the group immediately above. The fact that girls of such limited ability become members points perhaps to a pathetic eagerness on their part to share in spite of their handicap in an activity which unites so many of their peers.

It has been convincingly demonstrated¹ that educational attainment and measured intelligence are both strongly influenced by socio-economic factors, and, since library members appear to do relatively well in tests of intelligence and in school work, there was reason to suppose that they would be drawn predominantly from better-off homes. There is a certain amount of evidence from other sources that this in fact occurs. Carsley (1957), for instance, finds that the proportion of children who join the library is much higher among those who live in residential areas than on housing estates or in areas designated as 'Artisan'.²

1. Douglas (1964)

2. Among children aged 10-11 years, the proportion of active members of the library is given by Carsley as 62% in Residential Areas, 49.7% in Artisan A, 52% in Artisan B, 26.6% in Housing Estates.

Watts (1944)¹ also claims to have found that whereas in a fairly good working-class district more than sixty per cent of the children borrowed regularly from the public library, in a poorer district of the same borough fewer than twenty per cent did so.

Once again, the evidence is not all one-sided. Brearley (1949)², contrasting 'good' residential areas with 'bad', finds no significant difference in library attendance between the children living in them. Dunlop (1950)³ goes even further, claiming that in Glasgow children in the highest socio-economic group made less use than others of the library facilities available to them.

By and large it is likely that there will be a less adequate provision of library facilities in the poorer areas, and the evidence of Carsley and Watts does not rule out this as an explanation of the relative lack of support for the library in poorer districts. All the subjects of the present study, however, live within a radius of one mile of the only public library in the town, and those from poorer homes enjoy the same opportunities as others of making use of it. This may account for the fact among these children, at all events, proportionately as many of the manual working class join the Library as of the middle class. Nor, as the following table shows, is there any difference between boys and girls in this respect.

1. Op. cit. page 106.

2. Page 170. 37.75% library attendance among 7 to 11 year-olds in 'good' area, against 30.25% attendance in 'bad' area.

3. Page 96.

There is no evidence to suggest that the Library appeals more strongly to the sons and daughters of non-manual workers than to others.

Library Membership in accordance with Occupational Status of Parents.

	Boys		Girls		All	
	No.	Members %	No.	Members %	No.	Members %
Non-Manual	33	45	28	79	61	61
Manual	59	44	62	79	121	62

There is reason to believe, therefore, that when they are given equal opportunities, children from poorer homes are as ready as others to make use of the library. Much depends, of course, upon the degree of encouragement they receive from various quarters, and there is at least some evidence to suggest that the influence of the school is more important in this respect than that of the home.¹ Even so, it is still somewhat surprising that children from the manual working class, who on the whole are less successful in school work, should join the Library no less often than children from the middle class. These, of course,

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1. According to Carsley (op.cit.) low attendance at the library in Artisan B areas could not be attributed to a discouraging attitude on the part of parents. Brearley (op.cit.) records that 82% of his children said that their parents liked them to read, nor was there any significant difference from area to area in this respect. On the other hand, he found that library membership was significantly higher among pupils in schools employing free teaching methods, than in those employing formal methods.

are likely to have more books at home, whereas working class children who are interested in reading are more likely to be dependent on the public library to meet their needs. Ideally, a junior library would make available to all children the books which the most enlightened of parents in the best of homes would provide for their own. Just how close this or any other library comes to reaching this ideal must always be a matter of opinion, but there can be no doubt that in the area covered by this enquiry the Public Library does much to off-set the disadvantages suffered by children from the poorer homes.

The role of the home is not to be discounted, however, nor is the social status of the parents the only aspect of home life to have a possible bearing upon a child's attitude to reading. The size of the family cannot be ignored. It has often been shown that children from small families make higher scores in tests of intelligence than children from large families, and they are more successful in gaining grammar school places,¹ and if only for these reasons, a higher proportion of them might be expected to join the library. Moreover, whether a child has much time for reading will depend upon the other things which occupy him, and this depends in part upon the number of other children in the family. In large families the girls, if not the boys, are commonly expected to give some of their time to looking after

1. For recent data on, and a valuable discussion of, these questions, see Douglas (1964) pp. 91 et seq.

younger children. Furthermore, as an indoor pastime, reading competes with other activities in which a child can join with his brothers and sisters. On the surface, then, it is the solitary child, or the one with few brothers and sisters, who would seem most likely to be interested in reading. Nevertheless, as the following table shows, it is only among the boys that substantial differences appear; the girls from large families join the Library almost as frequently as those from small.

Library Membership and Family Size.

	Boys		Girls		All	
	No.	Members %	No.	Members %	No.	Members %
Small Families	123	51	137	72	260	62
Large Families	49	29	31	65	80	43
Significance	Chi-Square 7.38 P < .01		Not Significant		Chi-Square 9.63 P < .01	

Note: Large families are those containing four or more children, small families less than four.

An only child is not appreciably more likely to join the Library than a child with one or two siblings; it is only when the family has four or more children that it exerts any deterrent effect. This may be connected with the fact that scores in intelligence and attainment tests have been shown to fall considerably when families reach this size.¹ The child who is

1. Douglas (1964) p. 93.

one of many in the family often suffers certain disadvantages, and these operate to retard educational progress and also to discourage interest in leisure reading. Lack of privacy and loss of parental interest are among the causes in both instances, and in addition, as was mentioned earlier, it is likely that the child who has many brothers and sisters has other indoor interests and activities competing for his time.

We have tried to discover whether the children who join the Library differ from those who do not in level of intelligence and educational attainment, in social class and in family size. In the event, none of these factors proved to be as important as that of sex: the bulk of the children who join are girls, and the majority of those who abstain are boys. Otherwise, library members are chiefly characterised by their relatively high level of attainment in school work, and by the high proportion gaining grammar school places. They tend, also, to be of higher intelligence and to come from families with not more than three children. However, insofar as the girls are concerned, these factors are of only marginal importance; the great majority of them join the Library, undeterred by low intelligence, poor performance in school work, or membership of large families, nor do those who fail to join appear to have any distinctive mark in common. All the factors considered are known to be inter-related; school performance is to some degree dependent on intelligence, and both vary with the size of family. Considered separately, the level of school attainment is the most important

factor, and probably the only one to have any substantial influence.

Even so, it is not easy to say whether a child joins the library because he does well at school, or whether he does well at school because he joins the library. The probability is, as we have said, that both are true, but it is worth considering further whether joining the library benefits a child in his school work, and, more specifically, whether it markedly improves his chances of gaining a grammar school place. Is it the case, for instance, that of two children of similar intelligence, the one who is a member of the library is more likely to win admission than the other? The following table summarises the evidence.

Library Membership and Grammar School Admission,
at various levels of Intelligence.

	Library Members			Non-members		
	No. of Candidates	Number Successful	% Success	No. of Candidates	Number Successful	% Success
IQ 121+	9	7	78	1	1	100
101 - 120	31	14	45	21	4	19
below 101	33	2	6	31	3	10

Of all members of the library, regardless of intelligence, who were candidates for grammar school places, 32 per cent were successful, against only 15 per cent of those who were not members. Those in the higher reaches of intelligence, of course proved much more likely to win places. Of the ten with score of 121 or more only two were unsuccessful. both. surprisingly

enough, members of the Library. Evidently, among children as intelligent as this, the issue depends little, if at all, upon whether they make use of library books. At the other end of the scale, very few of the children with scores of 100 or less were successful, five only out of sixty-four, two of them members of the Library, three of them not. Among children of this level of intelligence, it is clear, the reading of library books cannot appreciably improve their prospects of entering the grammar school, whatever other benefits it may bring.

It is clear that the benefit, if any, is greatest for the children on or near the borderline. The highly intelligent child, whether he uses the library or not, is almost certain to win a place, while at the other extreme the dullest is almost certain to fail. The fate of the remainder, those whose intelligence falls between 101 and 120, is more doubtful, with about one in three being successful. In this marginal group, those who were members of the Library fared distinctly better than those who were not. Places were awarded to fourteen of the thirty-one members, but to only four of the twenty-one non-members. Library members among these border-line candidates gained proportionately more than twice as many places as non-members, and this was true of boys and girls alike. Unfortunately, the numbers involved are too small to put the matter beyond doubt,¹ but such as they are, they lend support to

1. Chi-Square, 3.02; not significant.

the suggestion, which pending further evidence must remain only a reasonable possibility, that joining the Library materially improves the chances of a child at the border-line of gaining a grammar school place.

Related to the question of which children join the Library is another: which children, having joined, drop out? A decline sets in, at about the end of their primary school lives, in the proportion of children who make use of the Library. It is possible that once in their secondary schools these children find new sources of books which make them less dependent on the Library. It may be, too, that the greater burden of homework that they have to bear leaves them with less time for leisure reading, and at this stage they are perhaps allowed more freedom to seek out rival forms of entertainment. Finally, as we suggested earlier, children whose mastery of reading skills is insufficient to enable them to graduate from books appropriate to childhood to those suitable for adolescence are very likely to lose interest at this point.

For all these reasons, the proportion of children joining the Library falls from 62 per cent of those in their last year at the primary school to 58 per cent of those in their first year at the secondary. At the same time, as the following table shows, the rate of decline is not the same for the boys as for the girls, or for those who qualify for grammar school places as for those who do not.

Library Membership among children of Grammar Standard and of Secondary Modern Standard in Primary and Secondary Schools. In Percentages.

	Grammar Standard		Secondary Modern Standard	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
In Primary Schools	61%	90%	41%	74%
In Secondary Schools	66%	74%	24%	58%

As may be seen, far fewer girls attend the Library after transfer to secondary schools than before, and the decline is much the same for those entering the grammar school as for those going to the secondary modern. The sharpest decline occurs among the less able boys; less than a quarter of these make use of the library in their first year at the secondary modern school, though more than forty per cent of this level of attainment did so in their last year at the primary school. In contrast, the abler boys, on transfer to the grammar school, tend to join the Library in larger numbers than before.

It appears from this that the fate of these children at the examination for secondary education has a considerable effect upon their attitudes to library books and possibly upon the whole course of their development as readers. In particular, it seems likely that many boys who previously have been members of the Library are discouraged from further borrowing by their failure to gain admission to the grammar school. To explore this possibility further, it was decided to find out what in

fact happened to members of the Library after transfer to their secondary schools. For these children, the record of their borrowing from the public library was extended for another year, the year following their admission to the grammar school or the secondary modern school.

Of the boys who were members of the Library in their final year at the primary school, thirteen entered the grammar school in the following year. Ten of them, (77%) continued to borrow books in their first year at the grammar school, though their rate of borrowing fell from 36.0 to 24.7 books in a year. The three who fell away had not previously been among the most assiduous of borrowers; their average rate of borrowing while at the primary school had been only 11.0 books in the year.

Twenty-two boys who had used the Library while at the primary school were admitted to the secondary modern school, and of these sixteen failed to borrow a single book in the following year. Only six (27%)¹ renewed their membership, but these increased their rate of borrowing from 15.0 to 18.0 books a year. Those who fell out include one who had previously borrowed 74 and another who had borrowed 56, and the average rate of borrowing, in their last year at the primary school, of the sixteen who fell away, was 15.7 books, slightly more than that

1. Although the numbers are small, the difference between the proportion of secondary modern and of grammar school boys who renew their membership is statistically highly significant: Chi-Square 9.88; $P < .01$

of the six who continued in the Library. Some keen readers, that is to say, are now deterred from further borrowing.

Among the girls, the results were rather different. Of the seventeen members who reached the grammar school, ten (59%) rejoined the Library in the following year, but whereas in the primary school they had borrowed at the remarkable rate of 58.6 books in the year, they now limited their borrowing to an average of 19.4. One of the seven who did not rejoin had taken out 52 books in the previous year, but for the most part they were not among the more regular readers, and their average rate of borrowing at the primary school had been only 20.3 books in the year.

Of the thirty-eight girls entering the secondary modern school, twenty (51%) continued to borrow from the Library, a proportion only slightly lower than among the entrants to the grammar school. Their rate of borrowing fell much less than was the case among the latter, from 32.4 to 27.4 books a year. Once again, those who fell out were for the most part girls who had made comparatively little use of the Library while at the primary school, since their average rate of borrowing in the year preceding transfer had been only 19.5 books each.

For the boys, their entry upon secondary education is obviously a turning point in their careers as readers of library books. Bright boys who have acquired the habit of using the

library while at the primary school tend to continue to do so when they reach the grammar school, and are joined by other successful boys who have not been members hitherto. They borrow rather fewer books than previously, probably because the burden of school work is greater now, and perhaps because a better supply of books is now available at school. In contrast, many of the boys entering the secondary modern school withdrew abruptly from the Library, including some who hitherto have been comparatively regular readers. Moreover, the few bright boys who do fall out are more than replaced by new recruits, but the losses among boys of secondary modern calibre are not recovered.

Upon the girls the effects of transfer are much less pronounced. Many of the abler ones stop using the Library altogether on entering the grammar school, and the others curtail their reading drastically. Many of those who enter the secondary modern school also allow their membership to lapse, but proportionately not many more than of those who reach the grammar school, and unlike the latter they do not significantly reduce the amount of their borrowing. On the contrary, many of them appear to read more avidly than before, as if in reading they find consolation for their failure.

To summarise, the majority of the eleven- and twelve-year-olds who join the Library are girls. It appeals equally to girls from manual working class as to those from middle class homes, to those from large families as to those from small. It

attracts all but a few of the abler girls and at the same time a considerable majority of the less able. Adverse circumstances which appear to prevent many of the boys from joining have little or no effect upon the girls. Among the former, the Library draws its recruits mainly from those who do well at school.

It seems to make no difference whether the father is a manual worker or not, but boys from families with four or more children are less disposed to join the Library than those from smaller families. All this applies to children aged eleven and twelve, and there is no direct evidence to suggest that it is true of others. On the contrary, in earlier years the Library casts its net more widely and draws in many whom it will not retain. Especially at about the age of ten, many children join the Library for what seems to be a trial period. The ones who later fall away will for the most part be those discouraged by their lack of progress at school and to some extent, perhaps, by the disadvantages associated with large families. At all events, as time goes on the Library draws its members from an ever narrower circle. Conspicuous among those whose interest it fails to retain are the boys who enter the secondary modern school.

CHAPTER VIII

Reading Interests and Educational Attainment

We have considered some of the factors which might be thought to have some bearing on a child's decision to join the Library or not, and have found that, apart from the child's age and sex, the one carrying most weight is the standard of work the child achieves in school: children who make relatively good progress are more prone to become members than those who do less well. However, the effects of school performance on leisure reading go much further than this. Once having joined the Library, the more able scholars borrow, not only more books, but other kinds of books, than the less able.

When we consider those members who are in their last year of primary education, or their first year of secondary, we find that those whose standard of attainment fits them for the grammar school borrow, roughly speaking, one book more each month than those who qualify for the secondary modern school. The following table gives the average numbers of books per child, borrowed in a year. In Group 'A' are the children already in the grammar school, or qualified to enter in the following year; Group 'B' comprises children at, or about to enter, the secondary modern school.

Average Issues according to Educational Level
of Borrowers.

	Group 'A'		Group 'B'	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
In Primary Schools	29.3	42.1	14.8	25.8
In Secondary Schools	<u>19.9</u>	<u>37.3</u>	<u>8.1</u>	<u>27.4</u>
In Both	23.2	39.0	13.3	26.4

Once again we see that children in secondary schools borrow rather fewer library books than their counterparts in primary schools, presumably because they have other things to occupy their time. In exception to this, the girls in the secondary modern school borrow slightly more, on an average, than Group 'B' girls still in the primary school. These differences, however, are less important than those between Group 'A' and Group 'B'. In every case there is a gap of ten or more between the brighter and the weaker pupils, and between the two groups of primary school girls the difference amounts to more than sixteen. The differences are smaller at the secondary stage, partly because the less assiduous readers among the secondary modern children have by now been winnowed out, and partly because the girls who enter the grammar school tend to borrow rather fewer books than before.

All this accords with our previous evidence. It is in keeping, too, with our expectations that the abler pupils should borrow more than others, if only because they are likely to be

faster and more efficient readers. Moreover, their success at school tends to confirm for them the value of reading library books, and although in the grammar school the pressure of homework and perhaps the availability of other books often cause them to reduce their borrowing, few of them allow their membership to lapse, and, as we have seen, after entering the grammar school some join who have never joined before. Conversely, of course, the less able pupils are likely to be less efficient readers and, in consequence, to borrow fewer books. Furthermore, in their case, time spent in reading library books has brought no obvious benefit to their schoolwork. While this seems not to deter the girls at all, the boys' interest falters badly when they fail to reach the grammar school.

One obvious effect, then, of poor performance at school is to reduce the amount of reading that a child does in its leisure time. In addition, it affects the quality of the books chosen, above all, perhaps, in their level of difficulty: the books generally chosen by the abler pupils demand a considerably higher standard of reading ability than those chosen by the weaker pupils. A book's ease or difficulty, we have suggested, may be gauged from certain of its external features - its format, number of pages, amount of illustration, size of type, and score for Reading Ease. In each of these aspects, the books picked by children in Group 'A' are more difficult than those chosen by Group 'B': they include a higher proportion of books in octavo, the format most commonly employed for adult books; they tend to

TABLE I

	B O Y S			
	Group A		Group B	
	Primary	Secondary	Primary	Secondary
Percent Octavo	91	91	87	84
Median Type Size	13.1	13.0	13.1	13.4
Median No. of Pages	195	206	187	194
Percent Illustration	5	3	10	7
Median Reading Ease	76	71	80	70
No. of Books Issued	439	537	350	63

	G I R L S			
	Group A		Group B	
	Primary	Secondary	Primary	Secondary
Percent Octavo	95	95	88	92
Median Size Type	13.0	12.9	13.7	13.2
Median No. of Pages	195	203	170	193
Percent Illustration	5	3	8	5
Median Reading Ease	76	73	79	77
No. of Books Issued	798	1,267	1,009	630

have more pages, fewer illustrations, smaller type, and to be written in more difficult language.¹

The books chosen by the brighter boys seem to have much the same external features as are characteristic of books chosen by the average boy of twelve; the less able boys, on the other hand, appear to choose books of a similar order of difficulty to those typically chosen by boys at about the age of ten and a half. Among the girls, too, there is a difference, roughly equivalent to eighteen months, between the level of difficulty of the books chosen by Group 'A' and by Group 'B'. The gap is much the same at both the primary and the secondary stage. There is reason to think, therefore, that in an unstreamed class of children aged eleven or twelve, the books likely to be suitable for pupils in the upper half of the class will be advanced by about a year and a half in difficulty over those suited to the lower half.

It has often been suggested that in some respects girls are more mature than boys in their reading tastes. Differences there certainly are, but for teachers of mixed classes it is perhaps worth noting that in terms of difficulty the books chosen by the boys are indistinguishable from those chosen

1. See Table I opposite.

by girls of equal educational standards. The books chosen by the boys in Group 'A' include a slightly smaller percentage of books in octavo, chiefly because the boys are more prone than are the girls to read works of non-fiction, which are often produced in quarto sizes. Apart from this, there is a remarkable similarity between their choices in number of pages, amount of illustration, size of type and Reading Ease. In Group 'B', the differences between the choices of the boys and girls are greater, but still very small. On the whole, the books chosen by the boys are slightly more difficult than those borrowed by the girls. At the primary school stage, the boys take out books which have more pages and smaller type than those favoured by the girls. At the secondary stage, the boys' choices include a higher proportion of books in large format, they contain rather more illustrations, and on the whole are written in more difficult language. To account for these differences, it must be borne in mind that the most backward among the boys do not attend the Library at all, whereas very many quite retarded girls do so. Apart from that, boys in Group 'B' read a relatively high proportion of works of information, and these often have more pictures, smaller print, and more difficult language than works of fiction.

In short, then, boys and girls of similar educational attainments choose books of much the same order of difficulty. In an earlier chapter,¹ however, it was said that except at the

1. Chapter IV, p. 87.

ages of six and seven, the boys who join the Library borrow books which are in general more difficult than those taken out by the girls. The obvious conclusion is that the boys who join the Library are on the whole of a higher educational standard than the girls. This is in fact the case with the eleven- and twelve-year-olds, since the least able of the boys very rarely join the Library, while many of the girls do so. We are now led to think that this applies at every age after that of seven. From the early stages of the junior school, among boys the habit of leisure reading tends to be restricted to the abler pupils.

In order to encourage interest in reading, it is important, of course, that there should be a good supply of suitably easy books, but this is probably not the essential problem. On the one hand, when reading for pleasure children as a rule choose books which are well within their capacity; on the other hand, when they are especially interested in a subject, they often choose books which are unusually difficult. As an illustration of this, the boys in the secondary modern school choose books which in terms of Reading Ease are rather more difficult on an average than those chosen by the boys in the grammar school. It happens that many of these boys are interested in practical subjects, and the fact that works of information are sometimes quite difficult to read does not deter them. It may well be, however, that less able readers are unable to find books which are sufficiently simple on the subjects which interest them. The chief lack, one suspects, is of simply written works of

Types of Books borrowed by Children at different levels of Educational Attainment.

	B O Y S				G I R L S			
	Group A		Group B		Group A		Group B	
	Primary %	Secondary %	Primary %	Secondary %	Primary %	Secondary %	Primary %	Secondary %
<u>Fantasy</u>								
Puppet Stories	1	-	2	2	1	-	4	2
Fairy Stories	2	2	5	9	8	3	12	10
Animal Stories	4	2	2	2	3	1	4	2
<u>Juvenile Realism</u>								
Pony Stories	-	1	-	-	6	4	4	9
School Stories	-	1	1	-	11	19	8	7
Gang Stories	15	15	11	16	15	15	11	9
<u>Romance</u>								
Mystery Stories	28	14	40	26	27	23	25	31
Adventure Stories	37	56	20	26	4	5	7	5
<u>Adult Realism</u>								
Family Stories	1	1	5	2	11	9	11	11
Adolescent Novels	1	-	-	-	5	8	4	6
Careers Stories	1	-	-	-	5	9	2	5
<u>Non-Fiction</u>	11	8	13	18	4	3	8	3

information suited to the non-academic boy.

It is a curious fact that works of information bulk larger in the reading of the less able than of the abler pupils. Boys and girls in Group 'A' take out an average of 1.7 works of non-fiction and 30.4 of fiction in the year; the children in Group 'B' take out 2.0 works of non-fiction and 20.1 of fiction. Non-fiction accounts for 5.3 per cent of the books borrowed by the former, for 9.3 per cent by the latter. Among the boys in Group 'B', works of information rank third in order of popularity after Mystery Stories and Adventure Stories.¹

It is not altogether easy to explain why non-fiction should appeal so strongly to the less able children. The bulk of those chosen by the girls consists of traditional fairy-tales and folklore very similar to the fairy stories popular with the younger children, and it is not surprising perhaps that these should attract the weaker girls. Folk-lore forms a very small part of the non-fiction chosen by the boys, however; for the most part they prefer books on science, and the useful arts and crafts. It is possible, of course, that the boys who do well at school, and especially those who are in the grammar school, do their 'serious' reading elsewhere, and come to the Library solely for works of fiction. It may also be the case that the boys who do

1. See Table II opposite.

well at school are the ones whose tastes are essentially literary, while those whose interests are in practical subjects do less well at the primary school and finally arrive at the secondary modern school. There are indications, at all events, that the boys who are most interested in non-fiction are not, on the whole, voracious readers, nor are they among the more successful in school work. Can it be that boys who are successful in their dealings with books at school come to enjoy reading for its own sake, and tend to read in their leisure time almost entirely for pleasure, whereas those whose experience of school books is not so rewarding tend to read rather less for pleasure and rather more for profit?

In the types of fiction that they choose, the abler children do not differ greatly from the weaker. Adventure Stories rank first in order of popularity with the Group 'A' boys, while Mystery Stories come second; with the Group 'B' boys this order is reversed, but with both groups the third place goes to Gang Stories. Together, these three kinds of stories account for 83 per cent of the books issued to the boys in Group 'A', and for 70 per cent of those to Group 'B'. No other type of story holds a very strong appeal for either group. Among the girls, highest in favour with both groups come Mystery Stories, accounting for roughly a quarter of all issues in each case. Predictably perhaps, School Stories are more popular with the abler pupils than with the weaker, occupying second

place in Group 'A' but only fourth place in Group 'B'. Gang stories occupy third place with both groups, while Family Stories rank second with Group 'B', fourth with Group 'A'. These four kinds of stories together account for 67 per cent of the issues to Group 'A' girls, and for 56 per cent of those to Group 'B'.

While there is a wide measure of over-lap between the tastes of the abler pupils and the others, there are a number of interesting differences, all of which point to the fact that the former are perceptibly more mature in their reading interests than the latter.

In the first place, the taste for Fantasy, though nearly outgrown, survives more strongly among the boys and girls in Group 'B'. Fairy Stories are much more popular with the weaker pupils, and even Puppet Stories continue to be read in appreciable numbers by the girls. In consequence, a higher proportion of the books they choose have unreal or fantastic settings, are peopled by toys, fairies, or animals, and contain some element of magic. It is the less able girls who chiefly read these stories at this age, but the more backward of the boys also read far more of them than do the brighter boys.

Another indication of their immaturity, related to the first, is the lack of interest on the part of the poorer pupils in realistic stories. Pony Stories, Gang Stories and School Stories, which together make up the category we have called Juvenile Realism, are all more popular with the more successful

pupils. Family Stories are more prominent among those issued to Group 'B' than to Group 'A', but, significantly, Careers Stories and Adolescent Novels, the other two belonging to the class of Adult Realism, are more often borrowed by the brighter children.

The realism of the Family Story, the Careers Story and the Adolescent Novel appeals chiefly to the girls. The boys, on the other hand, are more given to reading romantic stories, the Mystery Story and the Adventure Story. It is noticeable, however, that of these two the Adventure Story with its grown-up characters, its unfamiliar settings and its atmosphere of violence appeals more to the brighter boys, while the Mystery Story with its young protagonists, its familiar settings and its holiday atmosphere chiefly appeals to the more backward boys. It is a curious fact, however, that both are read rather more often by the backward girls than by the bright. The abler girls, quite obviously, have already progressed beyond Fantasy, and are already turning from Romance to Adult Realism. One indication of this progress is the fact that in 47 per cent of the books chosen by the Group 'A' girls the characters are human beings portrayed in what we have defined as realistic terms. In contrast, this is the case in only 33 per cent of the books chosen by the girls in Group 'B', in 13 per cent of those chosen by the boys in Group 'A', and in 15 per cent by boys in Group 'B'.

Yet more evidence of the relative maturity of the brighter children comes from an examination of the central characters in

the books they choose. We have already seen that as readers approach adolescence they tend to choose books in which the main characters are themselves adolescents or adults. As another instance of this, less than a quarter of the books selected by the boys in their first year at the grammar school centre upon a hero of primary school age, though boys of the same calibre still at the primary school continue to read a high proportion (41%) of books with such young heroes. This tendency on the part of readers to identify themselves with progressively older characters is a mark of their growing readiness to face adult problems and situations, and a sign too of maturing reading tastes.

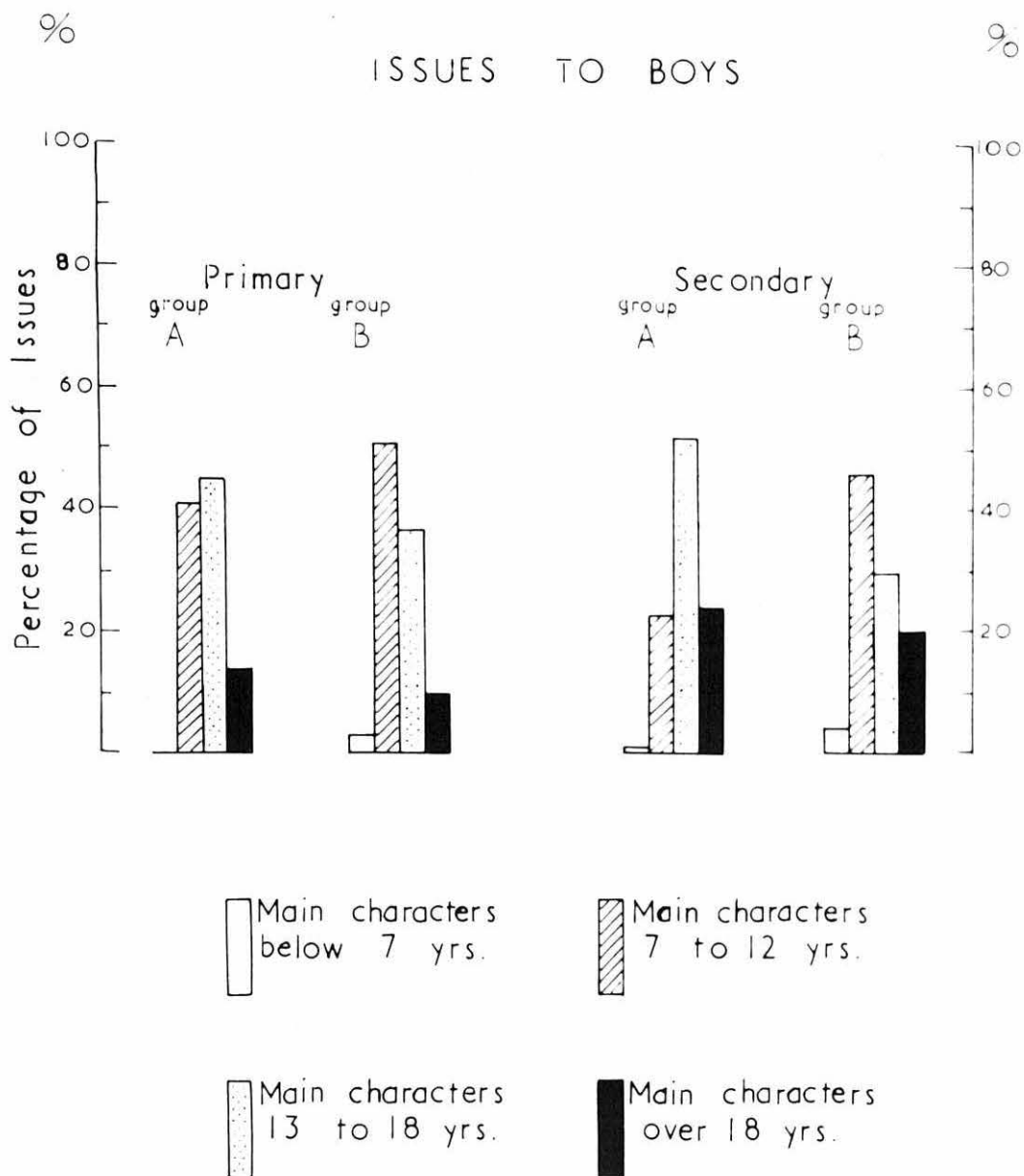
In this sense, the children of grammar school standard are appreciably more advanced than those of secondary modern calibre. The following table gives the average ages¹ of the heroes or heroines in the books they choose.

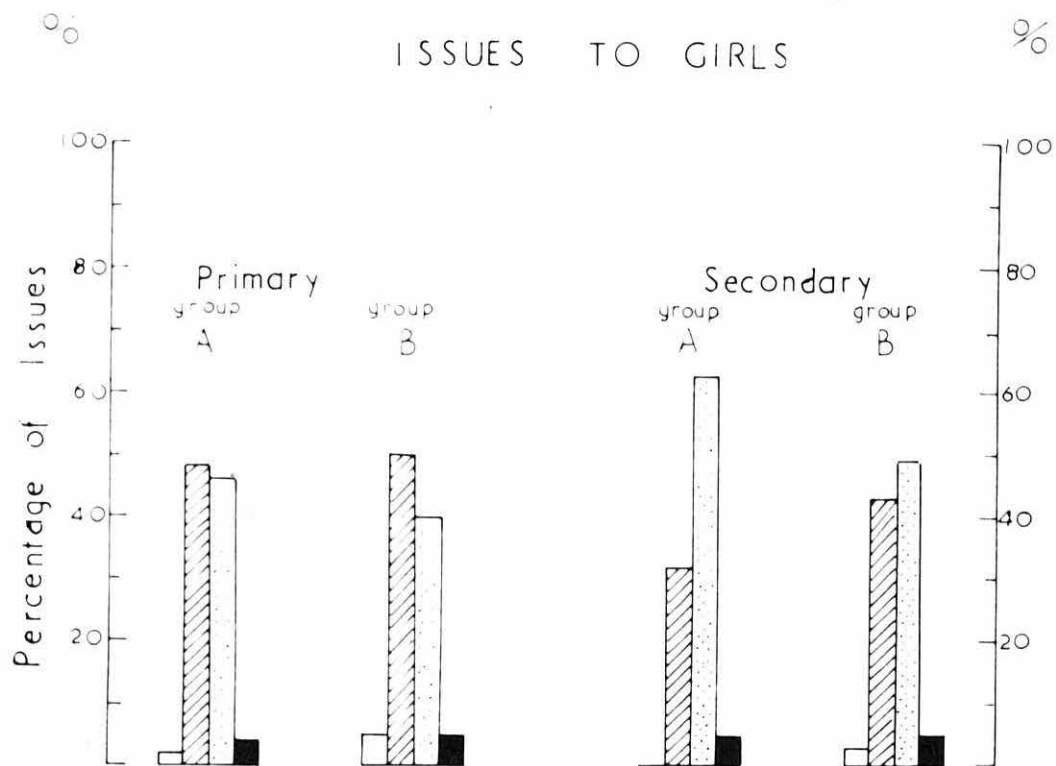
Average Age of Main Characters according to Educational Level of Readers.

	Group A		Group B	
	Primary	Secondary	Primary	Secondary
Boys	13.4	14.9	12.2	13.0
Girls	12.1	13.3	11.7	12.5

1. Calculated on the basis of ascribing the ages of 3 years, 9 years, 15 years and 21 years respectively to Pre-school, Primary School, Adolescent and Adult heroes or heroines.

FIGURE 10.
ANALYSIS OF ISSUES SHOWING
AGE OF MAIN CHARACTERS





Note: Group A — Children of Grammar school standard.

Group B — Children of Modern school standard.

The differences are larger in the case of the boys than of the girls, but what is perhaps more important is the fact that as children grow older the gap between the abler pupils and the weaker widens rapidly. At the primary school stage, the boys in Group 'A' favour heroes who are 1.2 years older, on an average, than those the Group 'B' boys prefer to read about; at the secondary stage, the difference has increased to 1.9 years. Similarly, among the girls a difference of .4 years at the primary stage grows to .8 years at the secondary. Even at the primary school the brighter pupils are appreciably more mature in their reading tastes than the weaker pupils, but after their admission to the grammar school they progress much more rapidly than those entering the secondary modern school.

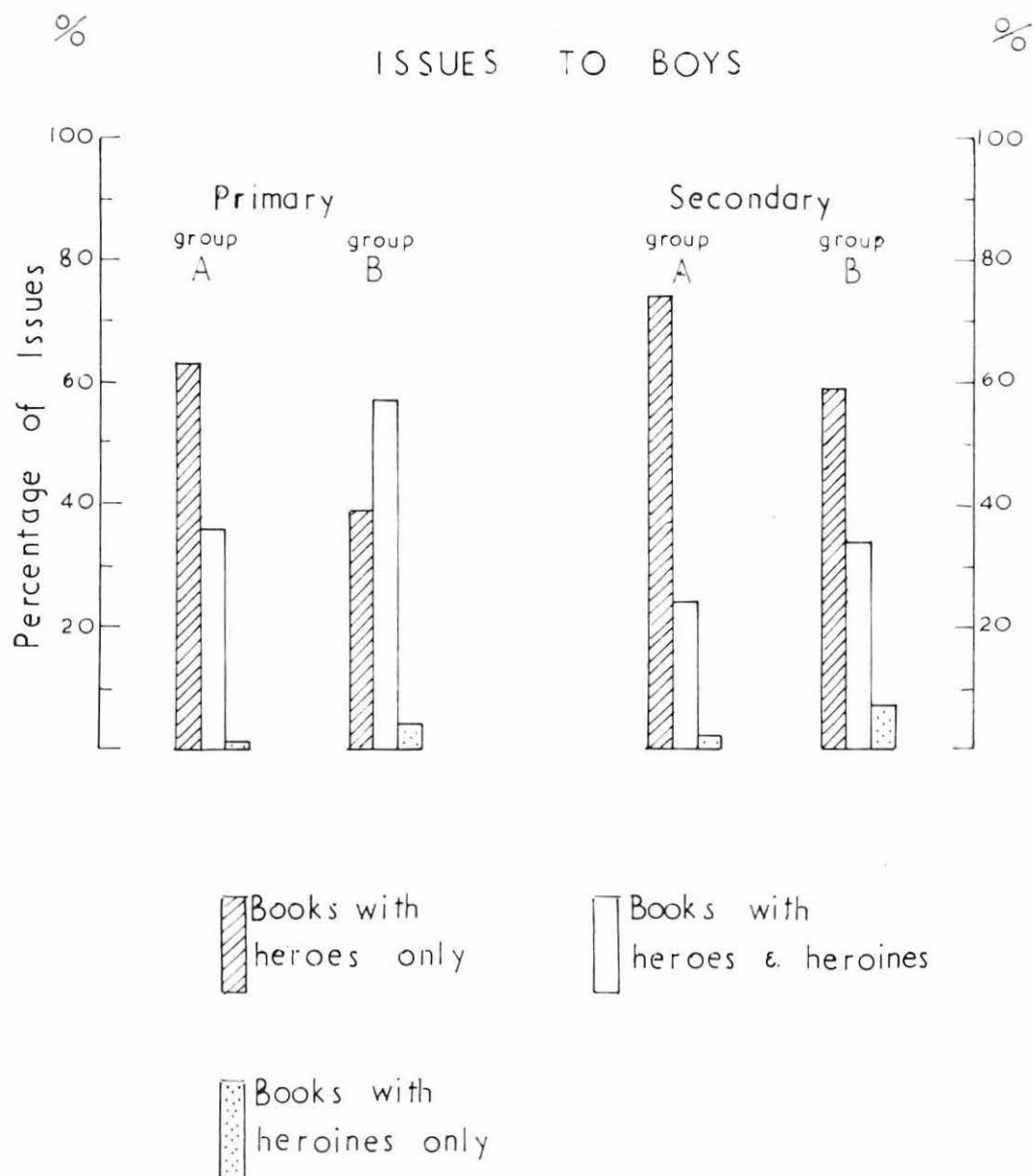
Figure 10 shows in greater detail how the choices of the various groups differ from each other. Here the books issued are analysed to show what proportion of them contains heroes and heroines who are infants, juniors, adolescents or adults respectively. It will be noticed that, both in the primary school and the secondary school, the children in Group 'A' choose books the majority of which have heroes or heroines who are adolescents or adults, whereas the Group 'B' children show more preference for books with principal characters of pre-school or primary school age. As an example, one half of the stories chosen by the boys in their first year at the secondary modern school are still concerned with characters of primary school age

or younger, while only a quarter of those chosen by the grammar school boys are of this kind. Oddly enough, it is stories with an adolescent hero that the secondary modern boys seem to avoid especially. They are almost as fond as the grammar school boys of stories with an adult hero, and, of course, read far more books with very young heroes. It is as if the boys who fail to reach the grammar school have a distaste for adolescence, and turn in imagination backward to childhood or forward to manhood. None of the girls at this stage read many books about adult characters, but it is again clear that the less able girls are much more pre-occupied with childhood than are the abler pupils.

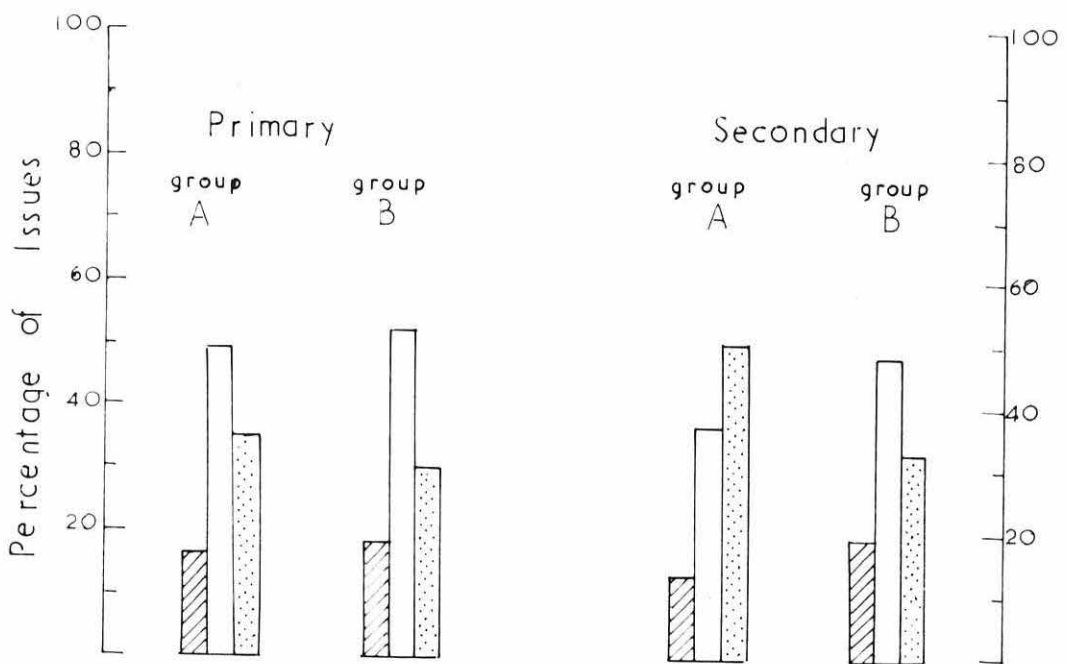
We have seen, too, that children tend to choose books about characters of the same sex as themselves, and that this tendency is accentuated as readers grow older. That is to say, it is a mark of maturity on the part of the girls to leave behind stories in which boys or a mixed group of boys and girls play the main roles, and to turn to stories centred upon girls only. At no time do boys read very many books concerned with girls, but the younger ones do read a fair number dealing with the activities of a mixed group. In the case of boys, progress towards maturity is marked by a gradual abandonment of these stories, and a growing preference for books concerned exclusively with male characters.

In this respect, also, the abler children show themselves to be more advanced in their tastes than the weaker pupils. Figure 11 presents the evidence on this point. Very few of

FIGURE II.
ANALYSIS OF ISSUES SHOWING
SEX OF MAIN CHARACTERS



ISSUES TO GIRLS



Note: Group A — Children of Grammar school standard.
 Group B — Children of Modern school standard.

the books chosen at this stage by the boys deal exclusively with female characters; nevertheless, at the primary school and at the secondary school, the abler boys appear considerably more masculine in their reading tastes, because they read comparatively few of the stories about mixed gangs, such as are popular with the poorer scholars. All but a quarter of those selected by the grammar school boys are books specifically intended for boys, whereas 40 per cent of those chosen by the secondary modern boys are equally suitable for girls.

Among the girls, the variations are much smaller. In the primary school, stories written for boys and stories written for both sexes are slightly more popular with the weaker girls than with the abler ones, but not until the first year at the secondary school do these differences become really noticeable. At this point, half of those read by the grammar school girls are books designed specifically for girls, but only one third of those chosen by the secondary modern girls.

To conclude, how many and what sort of books a child will read depends, to a very large extent, upon how well he or she does at school. The more successful pupils tend to join the Library in greater numbers and to borrow more books than do the others. Furthermore, in their level of difficulty, in their themes and in their treatment, the books they choose approach more closely than do those chosen by the weaker pupils to standards acceptable to mature readers. The abler boys generally

choose books which are more difficult to read, and they are quicker to abandon tales of fairyland and fantasy, books dealing with animated toys and puppets, books about the activities of children, and books in which girls play an important part. Above all, the brighter boys acquire much earlier the taste for reading the sensational adventures of romantic adult heroes. Among the girls, too, the better scholars show more maturity in their reading tastes. They likewise choose books which are more difficult to read, books whose themes are more closely related to adolescent and adult life, and whose chief characters are more often older girls. The abler girls, in short, make much more rapid progress in their reading towards realism and maturity of theme and treatment.

It is inevitable that some children should be able to read less fluently than others. It does not necessarily follow, however, that the needs and interests which they seek to satisfy through reading are different from, or less mature than those of abler readers. Too often, one suspects, poor readers are condemned to reading childish books simply because books dealing with themes appropriate to their emotional development, in terms suited to their limited abilities, are not readily available. There is a clear need, for instance, for books of adult adventure for boys, and for novels of adolescent life for girls, rather shorter and written in simpler language than is commonly the case with books of this sort. And, where such books are available, there is room for more positive guidance, on the part of teachers

and librarians, so that young readers, notwithstanding any handicap they may suffer in reading long or difficult books, yet may not be entirely deprived of books which meet their psychological needs. Failure to find suitable books must lead to a loss of interest in reading, but there may be other consequences which are still more serious. Just as the right books at the right time may help the reader to a more profound understanding of his own experience, so the wrong books may delay, or quite prevent, his gaining a mature view of life.

CHAPTER IX

Reading Interests and Measured Intelligence

The degree of success a child achieves at school is known to be linked with his intelligence as measured by tests of mental ability. We must expect to find, therefore, between reading and intelligence, very much the same sort of relationship as we have already found to exist between reading and educational attainment. For a number of reasons, however, it is worth considering them separately. Although closely allied to one another, scholastic achievement and mental ability are not synonymous. In the district in which these children live, tests of mental ability have no part in the selection of children for secondary education; the criteria employed for this purpose are simply those of school attainment, and depend to a large extent on verbal skills. There is something to be said, therefore, for assessing their leisure reading against the very different yardstick of performance in a non-verbal test of mental ability. Furthermore, the scores obtained from such a test permit of finer gradings than simple success or failure in an examination, and, the test being standardised, afford better means of comparison between these and children of other areas.

Already, in Chapter VII, we have had evidence to show that the higher the child's test score, the more likely is he or she to join the Library. It now appears that the more intelligent eleven- and twelve-year-olds not only join the Library in greater numbers, but,

having joined, make more use of it than do the less intelligent. The boys whose intelligence is rated at 101 or higher borrow an average of 21.8 books each in the year, while those whose scores is 100 or less take out 17.3 books each. The corresponding figures for the girls are 33.4 for those of more than average intelligence, and 29.6 for those of less.

The curious fact is not that the more intelligent children are greater readers but that the differences are so small, and when we look more closely, we find that the relationship between level of intelligence and volume of reading is far from clear-cut. The table below gives the average numbers of books borrowed by readers at different levels of intelligence, and from this it is at once apparent that, while the children at the top of the scale are on the whole the keenest readers, those at the bottom are by no means the most reluctant.

Average numbers of books issued to children at various levels of intelligence.

IQ.	71-80	81-90	91-100	101-110	111-120	121+
Boys	17.0	15.4	19.1	22.1	15.2	41.7
Girls	36.0	27.8	30.2	30.1	33.9	39.6

By and large, it is true, the average rate of borrowing declines as the level of intelligence declines. To the extent that this occurs, it is due, no doubt, to the fact that reading ability is closely related to measured intelligence, and a child's rate of borrowing will depend to some extent upon the fluency with which he reads. This cannot be the complete explanation,

however, since it utterly fails to account for the fact that among the girls those with scores between 71 and 80 read, on an average, more than any other group except the most intelligent of all, and the boys of similarly low intelligence also borrow at an unexpectedly high rate. When we consider separately those aged ten, eleven, or twelve, the same anomaly appears, to some degree, among the boys and girls alike. In other words, the children who are most interested in reading tend to be found at the extremes of the scale of mental ability, among the very bright and the very dull, rather than among those whose intelligence is closer to the average.

This is another pointer to the variety and complexity of the motives from which children read. A number of clues have already led us to suspect that in general the boys and girls read for somewhat different reasons, the former for purposes not entirely divorced from their work at school, the latter more obviously for recreation. We have seen too that the girls who fail to gain admission to the grammar school appear to read more avidly than before, possibly, it was suggested, to assuage their sense of failure. And now, finding that the very dull are almost as fervent in their reading as the very bright, we can only suppose that the satisfactions which they seek are not the same.

The satisfactions we derive from fiction are in an obvious sense substitutes for the satisfactions life itself affords.

Those whose experience of reality is entirely satisfying feel no compelling need for reading stories, any more than for day-dreaming. Among these is the 'average' child, whose abilities are neither so high nor so low as to set him apart from the majority, or to breed in him any strong dissatisfaction either with himself or with his situation. At home in the world in which he lives, needing neither refuge nor release, such a child reads but seldom, if at all. The child of high ability is less complacent. The activities in which his age-mates are utterly absorbed are not challenging enough for him: the horizons within which their lives are bounded are for him too narrow. Restless for new and more stimulating experiences, lonely for companions with whom he has more in common, he turns to books and becomes an avid reader. The child of very limited ability, in contrast, finds the activities which engage his age-mates, not unsatisfying, but beyond his means. Unable to find companionship or achievement in the real world, he has recourse to the imaginary world of books, and he, too, becomes an ardent reader.

All this, of course, is supposition, and over-generalised at that. If there is any truth in it all, however, it should turn out that the highly intelligent among these readers find an outlet for their aspirations in books which are not only more difficult than those chosen by the majority - that is only to be expected - but more concerned with people, places and events

outside their actual experience. Their need to widen their horizons should render them impatient of School Stories, Gang Stories and Family Stories, for instance, and impel the boys towards the Adventure Story, the girls towards the Careers Story and the Adolescent Novel.

At the other extreme, the books chosen by the least intelligent of these children should, of course, prove to be much simpler than those chosen by the majority, but they should also be found to be more childish in their characters, themes, and treatment. Fantasy, in the form of Puppet Stories and Fairy Stories, should bulk large among their choices, and Family Stories centred on young children should also be among their favourites. In other words, if our suppositions have any foundation, their reading should reflect a tendency on the part of these children to shun reality and to regress to childhood.

We can best test our theory by comparing one group of readers at the upper end of the scale of intelligence with another at the bottom, and by seeing how both differ in their reading habits from their age-mates as a whole. Confining ourselves to the eleven-year-old members of the Library, we find that the five brightest boys have an average intelligence of 125, the five dullest 77; the five most intelligent girls score 124, the five dullest 79. The brightest boys borrow an average of 44.4 books a year, more than twice the number borrowed by the

TABLE I

External Features of Books issued to most intelligent and least intelligent Children aged eleven years, in comparison with those issued to the entire Age-group.

B O Y S			
	High IQ	Low IQ	All aged 11 yrs.
Number of Readers	5	5	44
Average Issues	44.4	28.4	20.3
Percent Octavo	99	89	90
Median Type Size	12.8	13.0	13.0
Median No. of Pages	204	185	195
Percent Illustration	3.4	9.7	6.0
Median Reading Ease	74	80	77

G I R L S			
	High IQ	Low IQ	All aged 11 yrs.
Number of Readers	5.	5	55
Average Issues	45.8	25.8	28.4
Percent Octavo	96	79	91
Median Type Size	13.0	16.5	13.3
Median No. of Pages	190	116	189
Percent Illustration	6.1	19.6	6.0
Median Reading Ease	79	82	78

eleven-year-old boys as a whole, while the dullest take out 28.4, eight more than the average for the entire age-group. The rate of borrowing for all the girls aged eleven is also 28.4, that of the brightest 45.8, of the dullest 25.8. The first thing to emerge, perhaps, is the surprisingly high rate of reading on the part of the very dull, especially among the boys. Even more remarkable, however, is the fact that at the extremes of the scale of intelligence the differences between the boys and girls in the volume of their borrowing tend to disappear. It was suggested earlier that it is because they have less reason to be satisfied with the terms of their existence that girls read more than boys; a corollary of this is now borne out, that when they are equally at odds with their environment, boys and girls will tend to be equally interested in reading.

As we might expect, the books chosen by the very bright are more difficult, those chosen by the very dull more easy, than are read by the age-group as a whole. The evidence for this is given on the opposite page, in Table I. There it will be seen that among the books borrowed by the brightest children, there is a higher proportion in octavo format, they have more pages and fewer illustrations, the print is smaller and the language more difficult to read than is the case in the books borrowed by the age-group as a whole.

The over-all impression given is that the brightest

children are in advance of their age-group, the dullest considerably behind. But there are certain apparent discrepancies, the most obvious being that in terms of Reading Ease the books chosen by the brightest of the girls are, if anything, simpler on the average than those chosen by the whole age-group. This may be accounted for to some extent by the fact that works of information form an unusually small proportion of the books borrowed by the brightest girls, three per cent only, compared to eight per cent of the issues to all the girls aged eleven. It is worth remarking, too, that these bright girls choose books which are far less demanding than those read by the average twelve-year-old, to whom, after all, they are superior in intelligence. This, together with the fact that in terms of Reading Ease the gap between the very bright and very dull is so narrow, suggests that the more intelligent of the girls often read, in their leisure, books which make but small demands upon their mental powers. At the other end of the scale, the children of very low intelligence, one supposes, find their reading skill and their mental powers taxed to the utmost by the effort of reading books appropriate to their level of emotional development.

To some extent, of course, the choices which children make may not reflect entirely accurately their real tastes and interests, but may be forced upon them by the absence of books which are suitable in both language and content. It may well be that those responsible for producing children's books, in trying to cater for the majority, tend to neglect the minority

at each end of the scale. As a result, there may be on the one hand a lack of books for the highly intelligent, dealing with themes in which they are interested in language which offers a real challenge to their intelligence, and on the other hand, a shortage of books designed for children of limited ability, dealing with subjects suited to their age and interests in language within the scope of their understanding. For the least able, in any case, the effective range of choice is much narrower than for the abler children, since books written in language too difficult for them to read are to all intents and purposes inaccessible to them.

This may account in part for the differences between the very bright and very dull in their choice of books, but not entirely. In terms of difficulty, as we have seen, the gap between the two is surprisingly narrow; in themes and treatment, nevertheless, the books they borrow differ markedly, and these divergences result not so much from differences in powers of understanding as from different tastes and attitudes to reading.

Table II gives an analysis of the books issued to the very intelligent and very dull respectively, showing what proportion falls into each of the twelve categories previously described. For purposes of comparison it also gives the proportions for the eleven-year-olds as a whole.

TABLE II

Types of Books borrowed by five most intelligent, and five least intelligent members aged eleven, and by the whole age-group.

	BOYS			GIRLS		
	Low	High	All	Low	High	All
	IQ %	IQ %	All %	IQ %	IQ %	All %
<u>Fantasy</u>						
Puppet Stories	1	-	1	17	-	3
Fairy Stories	8	-	2	28	7	9
Animal Stories	2	7	2	9	1	4
<u>Juvenile Realism</u>						
Pony Stories	-	-	-	1	1	4
School Stories	1	-	-	-	13	10
Gang Stories	16	14	12	9	16	12
<u>Romance</u>						
Mystery Stories	38	25	32	9	32	26
Adventure Stories	19	46	35	6	3	7
<u>Adult Realism</u>						
Family Stories	5	-	-	6	16	11
Adolescent Novels	-	-	-	-	3	4
Careers Stories	-	-	1	1	7	4
<u>Non-Fiction</u>	11	6	11	14	2	6

It is immediately evident that in most instances the figures for the age-group as a whole fall somewhere between those for the very intelligent, and those for the very dull. This is not a very startling observation, but it does support the view that when children differ in their reading tastes from the majority of their age-group, the deviations are to some extent related to differences in intelligence, and to that extent predictable. Knowing, for example, that the most intelligent of the boys read fewer Fairy Stories and more Adventure Stories than is usual for the age-group as a whole, we may guess that the least intelligent will read more Fairy Stories and fewer Adventure Stories than is common, and in fact these guesses prove correct. The evidence does not warrant our saying that the proportion of Fairy Stories varies inversely, and the proportion of Adventure Stories directly, with the intelligence of the borrower, though it points in this direction, but it does warrant the more general conclusion that a child's reading interests depend to some extent upon his level of intelligence.

Our second general observation is that among the girls the differences between the two extremes are usually greater than among the boys. There is more identity of taste, that is to say, among the boys than among the girls. From the age of nine, the issues to the girls exhibit a much wider variety than the issues to the boys. The books borrowed by the latter consist almost entirely of Mystery and Adventure Stories, whereas books from each of the categories are among those taken out by the older

girls. This itself suggests that girls differ from one another in their reading tastes much more widely than do the boys, and it now appears that these individual differences are to some degree dependent on intelligence. The broad conclusion seems to be that girls of low intelligence are almost equally keen to join the Library as those of higher intelligence, but, having joined, they tend to choose vastly different kinds of books; the less intelligent boys, on the other hand, join the Library comparatively seldom, but when they do they tend to read much the same kinds of books as do the abler boys.

At the same time, there are important differences, both among the boys and among the girls, and the first of these is in the degree of interest shown in works of information. Once again the odd fact emerges that relatively few works of non-fiction are borrowed by the children of superior intelligence. On the contrary, the greatest readers of factual books tend to be children of very limited intelligence.

In apparent contradiction to this, the very dull also read a much higher proportion of works of Fantasy - Puppet, Fairy, and Animal Stories. These together form more than half the books selected by the least intelligent among the girls, but only eight per cent of those borrowed by the most intelligent. Most of the very few Puppet and Fairy Stories borrowed by the boys at this age are issued to those of very limited intelligence, but the very intelligent appear surprisingly fond of Animal Stories. When we consider that books as dissimilar as 'Black Beauty'

and 'Call of the Wild' both come within this category, this may seem less surprising. Certain Animal Stories are closely akin to Adventure Stories, and it is probably the element of adventure in these which attracts the boys of high intelligence, rather than what we have called Fantasy as such.

At first sight it is not easy to reconcile a liking for facts and a liking for fantasy, and yet boys and girls of very low intelligence are attracted to the obviously unreal Puppet and Fairy Stories, while at the same time choosing a good deal of non-fiction which has quite opposite characteristics. Regarded from this standpoint, their reading tastes seem inconsistent and difficult to explain. Looked at slightly differently, however, what the evidence shows is that these children, the girls especially, evince a certain tendency to avoid what we might call 'human' fiction - fiction, that is, dealing with human beings and having some claims to verisimilitude. The attitude of these children, were they able to put it into words, might well be that they like their facts to be obviously true, and their fiction obviously false, and they prefer to avoid the twilight zone between.

The enjoyment of fiction entails a surrender to the illusion it seeks to create, a temporary relaxation of the critical faculties. This is made easier when the language calls for no conscious effort to be understood. We more readily succumb to its suggestion when our minds are not constantly

alert to grapple with complexities of language. Our experience of poetry and oratory, as well as of fiction, would seem to give support to this idea, and it appears to explain why children prefer the language of their stories to be simple, although they are prepared to tolerate a high degree of difficulty in their works of information. In addition, the illusion, to be accepted, should not strain our credulity too abruptly or too far, but should wear a convincingly natural air quite different from the transparent artifice of the Puppet Story and the Fairy Story.

Some individuals, however, are more reluctant than others to be lulled into an acceptance of illusion, and more chary of losing sight of reality. This attitude is characteristic of the very young. For them it is not always an easy matter to separate fact from fancy, and their perplexity on this score can make them quite uneasy. Many parents must have experienced the difficulty of explaining to a child that the events in a story which have moved him to tears have not really happened. The young child's need to distinguish reality from unreality leads him to prefer stories which make no attempt to disguise their fictitious nature, and the Puppet Story and the Fairy Story appeal to him precisely because there can be no confusing the world they describe with the real world.

The same unwillingness to relax their hold upon reality is displayed by the group of readers with very low intelligence. It manifests itself in a similar liking for Puppet and Fairy Stories,

and also in their taste for works of information. An enthusiasm for books of the latter sort tends to be incompatible with a strong liking for ordinary fiction. Two things go to support this: in the first place, many of those Library members who take out works of information borrow no stories at all; and secondly, when the amount of non-fiction issued rises - as notably it does at the ages of nine and ten - it is, as we have seen, to the great detriment of the amount of fiction borrowed. What we are suggesting is that the taste for Fantasy and the taste for non-fiction are both symptomatic of a literal-mindedness essentially hostile to fiction, and that this attitude of mind is typical of the very young and of the less intelligent.¹

At the other extreme, what distinguishes the most intelligent is their great appetite for "human" fiction. Fantasy and non-fiction together account for only ten per cent of the books issued to the brightest girls; ninety per cent are stories, realistic or romantic, dealing with human beings and human experience. Books of this kind form less than a third of those taken out by the girls of very low intelligence. Among the boys, the contrast between the two ability groups is much less marked, but it is again evident that the appetite for ordinary fiction is stronger

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1. From a Freudian view-point, Lesser (1960, p. 49 et seq.) suggests that a certain reduction of control is necessary to the enjoyment of fiction, and that a chronic inability to 'let go' implies a weak ego organisation, "a fear that if the ego relaxed even a trifle it could not maintain order in its own house". Weak ego organisation is certainly associated with extreme youth, and possibly, though I am not aware of the evidence on this point, with low intelligence.

among those of very high intelligence than in those at the bottom of the scale.

Apart from what we conceive to be this fundamental difference in approach to reading, there are other dissimilarities of taste between the very intelligent and the very dull which are not adequately explained in these terms, and which call for somewhat different explanations. It is not difficult to understand why the girls of low intelligence should borrow none of the School Stories which are so popular with others of their age, but it is less obvious why they should ^{read} so very few Mystery Stories, which are highly popular, not only with the majority of eleven-year-old girls, but also with the boys no more intelligent than themselves. Equally odd is the fact that compared with the majority of their own sex, the least intelligent boys read more Gang Stories and Family Stories, while the least intelligent girls read fewer. These are just some of the inconsistencies which need to be accounted for.

The child of average intelligence or more may be supposed to cope fairly adequately with the situations confronting him in the physical world and in the sphere of human relations. To that extent he is free to send his imagination forward, as it were, to reconnoitre the life that lies ahead, and much of his reading therefore becomes a form of preparation for the future. As we have seen, the average child tends to choose books set in scenes which are as yet unknown to him, among people older than himself

and engaged in activities to which he has not yet been initiated; he often seeks to model himself upon characters more mature than himself, possessing qualities and attributes to which as yet he can only aspire. On the other hand, the child of very low intelligence is, almost by definition, one who finds difficulty in dealing with situations which his age-mates meet with ease. Whereas they adapt themselves quickly to the physical and social world in which they find themselves, he is anxious and perplexed. Two courses are open to a child so handicapped: on the one hand, he may redouble his efforts to comprehend his situation, or, on the other, he may refuse to meet reality. As far as their reading is concerned, those who choose the first course will tend to choose books which have some relevance to their current experience; those who adopt the latter will avoid books which relate too closely to their actual existence, and read those which enable them to regress in imagination to a simpler world and a more immediately satisfying mode of life. The five boys of low intelligence considered here seem to have adopted, on the whole, the first course; the five girls appear to be committed to the second.

More than one-third of the books chosen by all the boys aged eleven are set against unfamiliar backgrounds - in the desert, jungle, sea, or air, in great cities or in foreign countries - and the most intelligent among them show an even stronger liking for these remote or exotic scenes. The least intelligent, in contrast, choose proportionately roughly half as many stories with these settings, and are more disposed to favour books set against the

TABLE III

Analysis of Issues to Eleven-year-olds of very high and very low intelligence, showing percentages having certain types of Background.

	B O Y S			G I R L S		
	Low IQ	High IQ	All	Low IQ	High IQ	All
	%	%	%	%	%	%
<u>Fantasy</u>						
(Fairylane, Magical)	5	-	2	21	4	7
<u>Domestic</u>						
(Nursery, Home, Farm)	4	2	3	15	7	7
<u>School</u>	4	1	3	-	19	12
<u>Neighbourhood</u>						
(Countryside, Village, Small Town)	38	22	25	26	39	37
<u>Holiday</u>						
(Sea-side, Castles, Circus)	22	21	19	11	20	19
<u>Remote</u>						
(Foreign Country, Large City, Air, Sea, Space)	19	48	37	20	10	14
<u>None</u>						
(Instructional Books, etc.)	8	4	7	7	1	2

relatively familiar background of countryside, village, or small town. The figures given in Table III will perhaps bring out this contrast.

The impression this conveys is that for the less intelligent among these boys their reading, even of stories, is largely a means of understanding and coming to terms with their own circumstances. It is indicative of their approach that, far from avoiding stories set in school, they choose rather more of them than do the very intelligent. It is true that they are slightly more prone than the majority of their age to take refuge in stories set in fairyland, but this detracts little from the picture of children essentially concerned with everyday realities.

This is borne out even more clearly, perhaps, by the sorts of characters which appear in their stories, and by the kinds of themes which mainly interest them. In almost a fifth of the books they choose, the characters are ordinary human beings, realistically drawn. They are less concerned than their age-mates with tales of high adventure, war, capture and escape, violent crime and death, and turn more to books such as those of Richmal Crompton, Arthur Ransome and Enid Blyton, which deal essentially with the activities of children like themselves, with boyish sport and mischief, and with the relationships, friendships and rivalries of the peer group. They are even more interested than are their contemporaries in Mystery Stories, and this too, we may suppose, reflects their eagerness to understand the complexity of human motives and relationships.

The average boy of eleven is already looking to those older than himself, to adolescents or to adults, for models upon which to shape his own personality. In more than half the books issued to all the boys in this age-group, the heroes are youths or grown men, and this is so in more than two-thirds of the books chosen by the most intelligent. Those at the bottom of the intelligence scale, on the other hand, are content with heroes whose average age is 10.8 years, of much the same age as themselves, that is to say, whereas the average age of the heroes of the books chosen by the most intelligent is 14.1 years. The characters they admire in fiction are not, on the whole, youths or men who excel among other men by virtue of their courage, aggressiveness, or qualities of leadership; rather are they children not unlike themselves who, by dint of loyalty to their companions, win acceptance among other boys and girls, in the family, and in the community at large.

It is true, of course, that in certain aspects the books chosen by these boys of low intelligence are very similar to those favoured by somewhat younger children, and in that sense it is fair to say that these boys are immature in their reading. In its total pattern, however, their reading differs not only from that of eleven-year-olds in general, but from that of younger children also. It is not that they read like ten-year-olds or nine-year-olds, though in certain superficial respects this is obviously true. The fact is that they read for a completely different purpose, as eleven-year-olds striving to be accepted as eleven-year-olds. Others, whatever their age, read to anticipate

the future; these boys read to meet and comprehend the present.

The same cannot be said of the girls of low intelligence. The books they choose bear many of the hall-marks of those read by girls of eight or nine. A very high proportion, 20 per cent of them, are set in fairy-land or in the world of magic, and a further 15 per cent in domestic settings - the nursery, home, or farm. To point the contrast, the figures for the brightest in the age-group are 4 per cent and 7 per cent respectively, and for the age-group as a whole, 7 per cent and 6 per cent. Were this all, it might be thought that these girls were merely immature in their reading. At the same time, however, 20 per cent of their stories - proportionately twice as many as are chosen by the very bright - have romantic or exotic backgrounds such as jungles, deserts, or foreign cities; they entirely shun stories in school settings, and are much less attracted than is usual among girls of this age to stories with the more familiar back-cloth of the countryside or village. All this goes to suggest that for these girls their reading is intended neither to widen the boundaries of their experience, nor to lead them to a clearer understanding of their actual experience, but on the contrary to provide them with a refuge from their every-day existence.

This is borne out by their lack of interest in stories which deal with human beings. Fewer than half the books they choose

are concerned with human characters; a quarter of them are peopled by puppet animals and toys, the remainder by fairies or real animals, whereas, by way of contrast, 90 per cent of those chosen by the most intelligent are concerned with human beings. Moreover, unlike the boys of similarly limited intelligence, these girls, when reading about human beings, prefer them to be portrayed in romantic rather than in realistic terms. Their choice of themes reveals the same desire for escape. They show little interest in the activities of children like themselves, in relationships between members of a family or with friends, but more than common interest in tales of fantasy or magic, in stories of sensational adventure, and in humorous incidents.

Most significant of all, perhaps, is their reluctance to identify themselves with characters similar to themselves. As has been said, very many of the books they choose contain no human characters at all, but in one-third of those which do the chief character is male. A quarter of their heroes and heroines are children of pre-school age, nearly a half are children of primary school age, and the remaining quarter are adolescents or adults. On the other hand, adolescents or adults play the main roles in 50 per cent of the books issued to the age-group as a whole, and in only 4 per cent is the hero or heroine a child of pre-school age. As a result, the average age of the main characters in the books chosen by the girls of very limited intelligence is only 9.3 years; in the books of

the entire age-group it is 11.7 years, and in those of the most intelligent it is 12.0 years.

What needs to be emphasised is that this is indicative not only of an emotional immaturity which might be expected to remedy itself as the child grows up and gains experience, but also of a regression to infancy and a withdrawal from reality which might conceivably impede the child's progress to maturity. To judge from their reading, the majority of girls at this age attach great value to gregariousness: the attribute which more than any other distinguishes the heroines and heroes they generally admire is that of loyalty to, and acceptance by, their fellows. These girls of limited intelligence are conspicuously indifferent to such qualities; their favourite characters are often solitary individuals, secure in their enjoyment of parental protection, or possessed of a magic secret which will grant their wishes. In this respect they contrast sharply with the boys of similar intelligence, who, to judge from the books they read, value the companionship of their peers even more than do most other boys; their ideal is to be as much like other boys as possible. In contrast, these girls want, not to be like other girls, but to escape from themselves and be quite other than they are.

These boys and girls of limited intelligence have a mental age corresponding to that of the average child of eight or nine, but their reading marks them off as being quite different, in certain ways, from the average eight- or nine-year-old.

Similarly, although the most intelligent of these readers have the mental age of an average boy or girl aged thirteen or fourteen, their tastes in books are not nearly so mature as this might lead one to expect. In most respects, perhaps, their interests are closer to those of boys and girls aged twelve than to those of their own age, but in no sense are the books they choose as far superior as their mental age seems to permit. The fact is that in experience, in first-hand knowledge of human vicissitudes and relationships, they are not necessarily less limited than their fellows, and it is this, rather than their mental ability, which determines the sort of subjects which will interest them in books. Broadly speaking, the choices of these highly intelligent readers are not startlingly different from those of the average boy or girl of the same age, and such differences as do appear do not show that these children differ radically from the majority in their approach and attitude to reading.

Long before the age of eleven, as we have seen, boys begin to turn from Puppet Stories and Fairy Stories, first of all to Mystery Stories, and, later still, increasingly to Adventure Stories. This, roughly, is the path they follow in their progress towards mature reading tastes, and on this path the most intelligent of the eleven-year-olds are ahead of the majority of their age, but still some way behind the average twelve-year-old. Mystery Stories and Adventure Stories respectively account for 25 per cent and 46 per cent of the books

issued to the most intelligent eleven-year-olds; the corresponding figure for the twelve-year-old boys as a whole are 18 per cent and 49 per cent. To compare the average ages of the heroes they admire brings out the point even more clearly perhaps: in books issued to all eleven-year-olds, the average is 13.2 years; to all twelve-year-olds, 15.0; to the most intelligent eleven-year-olds, 14.1 years.

In general, then, the reading tastes of the brightest of these boys fall some way between those of the average eleven-year-old and those of twelve-year-olds. The differences between them and their age-mates are smaller than might have been expected, but the direction of these differences is much what was anticipated. They show remarkably little interest in stories set against prosaic or familiar backgrounds; the home, the school, the countryside, the village and the small town are much less attractive to them than to their age-mates, and they read instead stories about places associated with freedom and adventure. A remarkable number of the books they choose have a holiday background - the sea-side, castles, caves and so on - and, of course, many others are stories about the sea, the air, foreign lands and distant planets. Even more than boys of average intelligence, these boys find their everyday existence too restricted, and read not so much to explore their present situation as to transcend its narrow limits.

The girls of high intelligence differ from their age-mates

even less, if anything, than do the boys. A further glance at Table II will show how closely their choices resemble those of the age-group as a whole. They read fewer works of Fantasy than do the majority, but there are few other signs of exceptional maturity. There are even signs of a certain immaturity, notably in their lack of interest in stories in which adults are involved. On approaching adolescence, girls become increasingly concerned with their relations with grown-ups, and this is reflected in their growing fondness for Adventure Stories, Adolescent Novels and Career Stories. In spite of their exceptional intelligence, however, these five girls are scarcely more interested than others of their age in stories of this sort; on the other hand, they read even more Mystery Stories than does the average girl of eleven, and far more than the average girl of twelve. In these Mystery Stories, as in the Family Stories, School Stories and Gang Stories of which these girls read so many, the characters are predominantly children, and consequently the impression that one gets from looking at the books they choose is of children entirely absorbed in the affairs of childhood.

There is certain other evidence in support of this. The average age of the main characters in the books they choose is 12.0 years; this is higher than 11.7, which is the average for the age-group as a whole, but very low when compared with 13.0, which is the average for the twelve-year-olds. Again, further reference to Table III shows the extent to which their reading is confined to

books which have as their background places such as are probably quite familiar to them. The school, the countryside, and the sea-side appear in a surprisingly large number of their books, and they rarely choose books with remote or foreign settings. In short, their reading expresses none of the yearning for wider horizons, none of the longing for grown-up freedom which seem to inspire the reading of the boys of similarly high intelligence. On the contrary, the holiday atmosphere so prevalent in their stories, the youthfulness of the characters, and above all, perhaps, their liking for very easy reading, all point to the conclusion that for these girls, the reading of library books is essentially a form of relaxation, almost of self-indulgence, and as such quite different from the "serious" reading they associate with school.

We began by advancing it as an hypothesis that children of exceptionally high intelligence read in order to reach out for new, less limited, fields of experience, while those of very low intelligence read in order to find refuge in a fictitious world that is simpler and less demanding than the real world. In the event, however, the evidence does not entirely support this theory. The ablest of the boys, it is true, read much the sort of books we might expect of youngsters who find their day-to-day existence much too circumscribed; the very unintelligent among the girls also conform to our predictions; but the five most intelligent of the girls and the five least

intelligent of the boys evince quite unexpected tastes in reading. Consequently our initial assumptions need to be modified and extended.

The purposes for which people read may be considered as falling into three broad classes. Firstly, they read for information. They consult dictionaries, time-tables and directories in order to solve an immediate practical problem - to check a spelling, to catch a train, or to find an address. Secondly, they read for education, to effect changes within themselves, to develop abilities and skills. Still present, though more remote, is the practical and conscious purpose - to repair a car, to pass an examination, or to train for an occupation. Finally, they read for recreation, with no other conscious purpose than that of gaining pleasure. In practice, of course, it is not always easy to separate the three. Not infrequently the reader derives pleasure from the books he reads ostensibly for information; he may also gain some educational benefit - an increased command of words, for instance - from those he reads expressly for enjoyment. Apart from this, he may not be aware of, or be able to express, all the motives which impel him to read a given book.

This is especially true of books he reads allegedly for pleasure. More often than not, this is the only purpose of which children are aware when choosing their library books. To be sure, they sometimes choose a book for information or

instruction, and to the extent that it serves their purposes they find it enjoyable to read. In this case, their pleasure is the outcome of their having achieved their purpose. Even when they read for recreation, the pleasure they experience is again incidental, a sign that other purposes have been served. The essential difference is that the children themselves are not aware of the deeper needs and aims for which they read.

Recreational reading - and by this is meant reading for which the overt purpose is enjoyment - appears to serve four main functions, and readers differ from one another to the extent that their choice of books is dominated by one or other of these four.

First come those who read for what might be termed emancipation. These are the children whose qualities of mind, heart, or imagination find insufficient outlet in the daily round to which they are confined. Typical of these are the highly intelligent boys whose reading enables them to pass beyond the frontiers of their personal experience, and to meet the future before it comes. It is part of their search for fresh purposes and goals, fresh values and ideals - part, that is, of the process of evolving for themselves a new and more mature identity. This is why the books they choose so often introduce them to a world that is wider than their own, to people older than themselves, and to situations which their youth has not allowed them to experience. If, in consequence, much of their fiction is

romantic or far-fetched, it is because they lack the touch-stone of first-hand experience by which to judge of its authenticity.

Next come those who for some reason are unable to participate effectively in the activities and experiences common to their fellows, and for whom, therefore, reading serves as a means of compensation. This appears to be its function for the five boys of low intelligence considered earlier. Part of the pleasure of visiting the Library and of reading books comes from the fact that these are activities shared with other children, but in addition the books they choose are usually such as offer them vicarious membership of a group, and vicarious participation in the activities they envy. For that reason, their favourite fiction usually mirrors with some fidelity their own familiar world and the lives of boys and girls of their own age.

Very similar to these are the books chosen by children who read primarily for relaxation. These, however, are not children who are handicapped in the effort to meet the demands of day-to-day existence; on the contrary, they may be very able and well-adjusted; they are, nevertheless, children whose leisure reading is a form of self-indulgence, a sort of holiday from effort. Indeed, a holiday atmosphere pervades many of their stories, which are remarkable also for the small demands they make upon their readers. The fact that these children are given to such "light" reading in their leisure hours does not

mean that they do no more serious reading at other times. The five very intelligent girls who read library books for relaxation are probably at least as enthusiastic as other children in reading serious books at school. Grammar school pupils obviously must do a good deal of quite exacting reading at other times, but the grammar school girls especially tend to regard the Library as a source of books to be read purely for relaxation. They may even feel some guilt about reading library books, since, unlike the boys, many of them reduce considerably their borrowing from the Library once they are admitted to the grammar school.

Finally there are those whose reading may be called regressive. Over-taxed by the demands of daily living, or rebuffed in their efforts to come to terms with other people, they turn to reading not to find solutions to their problems, but to find refuge from them. They often show a preference for books markedly more childish, in make-up and in language, in themes and in treatment, than is appropriate to their age or ability. The key-note of their reading, however, is not its immaturity, but its studious avoidance of all contact with actuality. In many cases, human beings have no place in the books they choose; in others, the human characters who do appear are endowed with magical or superhuman attributes, the worlds they inhabit are fantastic or, failing that, exotic and remote, and their activities and way of life quite unrelated

to their readers' waking world. Such reading has the appearance of a neurotic refusal to face reality, but it must be remembered that his reading is only part of the individual's response to circumstances; even if he is thoroughly unrealistic in his reading, he is not necessarily ineffectual in other ways. At the same time, if a child's reading is habitually of this kind, it argues some anxiety, some sense of personal inadequacy on his part, arising from some difficulty in meeting life's demands.

One does not always find that a child's recreational reading is directed exclusively to any one of these four goals. Some children show much diversity in their choice of books, and in these cases, presumably, each choice they make is the outcome of the mood and interest of the moment rather than of any more constant attitude or preoccupation. Others are much more consistent. Their tastes remain unchanged for long periods, sometimes over the whole year. These are often avid readers, in whose lives recreational reading clearly plays an important role. In such cases, it is often possible to divine the need for emancipation, compensation, relaxation or regression that underlies the individual's choice of books. The "average" child has no great or sustained need for any of these, but those who for one reason or another are less well attuned to their environment tend to rely heavily on the help of reading. The possession of unusually high intelligence, as well as of

unusually low, may render it difficult for an individual to adapt harmoniously to his situation, but there may be other, even greater, obstacles, many of them peculiar to the individual.

In the final resort, each person's reading has its unique, though changing, pattern, and while it is sometimes possible to discern, and perhaps to account for, some of its more dominant motifs, it is impossible to analyse or to explain the complexity of the whole.

CHAPTER X.

Leisure Reading and Parental Occupation

With whatever aspect of human behaviour we may be concerned, it is always difficult to disentangle the effects upon it of innate potential, physical environment and cultural influences. We have already tried to find to what extent, and in what ways, children's reading tastes and habits are affected by their educational attainment and their level of intelligence, but no-one would wish to deny that other, possibly more important, factors are involved. In particular, there can be no denying the importance of the part played by the home in laying the foundations of reading skills and in fostering an interest in books. Some children are taught to read and have acquired a taste for books even before they enter school, and it is not unknown for some to be brought regularly to the Library to borrow books even at the age of three. All children are not so fortunate, however, and it appears, at first sight at least, that all the advantages are with those who come from middle-class homes.

These advantages are two-fold: material, and cultural. The more prosperous the home, the more likely it is to afford the warmth, light and privacy which are necessary if much time is to be spent in reading, and the more likely it is to contain an adequate supply of books or other reading matter. In addition, the family is more likely to be small, and the children in it relatively free from the

task of looking after or entertaining other children. All this means that there are in the middle-class home better opportunities for reading, but there are other, less tangible, advantages. The parents are likely to be more intelligent and better educated than parents who do manual work. Their children benefit from this in many ways: they tend to inherit their parents' high intelligence;¹ they are more likely to be given a grammar school education;² by dint of hearing and using language of good quality in the home, they are better able to acquire verbal skills;³ and their parents are more likely to encourage them, by precept and example, not only to read, but in all their work at school.⁴

Moreover, the neighbourhood in which the home is set tends to reinforce the influence of the home itself. The middle-class home usually forms part of a middle-class community in which the material and cultural standards are generally high. The manual worker's home, on the other hand, is more likely to be part of an area ill-supplied with schools, libraries, and other such amenities, where the language spoken is often impoverished and incorrect, and where an interest in books is not taken for granted, but may even be looked upon askance.

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1. On this point see, for example, Thorndike (1951).
 2. See Douglas (1964), pp. 14-22.
 3. See Bernstein (1961).
 4. See Coster (1958).

Were this the whole story, there would be little point in pursuing the matter further, but, of course, there are other things to be considered. In the first place, the individual himself is not inert under the impress of environmental forces; his native attributes and capacities may render him singularly apt to receive their imprint, or remarkably resistant; he may respond, or he may rebel. And secondly, although the influence of the home may be paramount while the child is very young, other forces are later brought to bear, some to counteract, others to reinforce, the initial impetus it gives. Formal education, obviously, is one such force, adding its influence to that of the favourable home, and off-setting, to some extent, the ill-effects of an unfavourable home.

The important question, therefore, is not whether a middle-class home back-ground favours the development of the reading habit - this can hardly be denied - but whether its effects continue to be felt after other factors have begun to operate. In the early stages of their reading, children from better-off homes undoubtedly have a substantial advantage over others, but, if schools are as effective as we wish to think, the gap should be progressively reduced with every year of education, as the school comes to assert its influence against that of the poorer home, and to afford all children the opportunities and facilities available only in the more privileged of homes.

As far as mere skill in reading is concerned, this question has often been explored, but it still is not completely settled. McLaren (1950) considers that the gap in reading ability between children with different socio-economic backgrounds is largely the reflection of differences in inherited mental ability, and remains undiminished, in spite of education, at least until the age of eight. Schonell (1948), on the other hand, attributes the low reading ability of children from poor homes to the poverty of their vocabulary, arising out of a background of cultural and experiential impoverishment. Connor (1954) takes the same view, but finds only a relatively low correlation between reading ability and socio-economic background among children at the age of twelve, and therefore suggests that as, with schooling, children become able to extend their horizons vicariously through reading, home influences gradually diminish in importance.

Turning to leisure reading, we need to ask whether children with different home backgrounds have significantly different tastes and habits, in spite of some years of formal education, and in spite of having done equally well at school. In order to answer this question, we set out to compare the books chosen by children of the same age and the same level of educational attainment, but with different socio-economic backgrounds. The most suitable group to study are the eleven-year-olds, who are all verging on completing the common, primary, stage of their education, and who have signalled their level of attainment by their success or failure at

the examination for selection for secondary education. They are divided according to the occupational status of parent or guardian, into the manual, and the non-manual, working class. As a result, for each sex there are four groups: Group I, consisting of children who have qualified for admission to the grammar school, and whose parents are in non-manual occupations; Group II, consisting of children who have also qualified for places in the grammar school, but whose parents are in manual occupations; Group III, consisting of children who have failed to gain entry to the grammar school, and whose parents are non-manual workers; Group IV, consisting of children who also have failed to gain places in the grammar school, but whose parents are manual workers. The task, in essence, is to compare the reading habits of Group I with those of Group II, and those of Group III with those of Group IV.

We found in Chapter VII, when considering the ten-, eleven- and twelve-year-olds together, reason to believe that the children of manual workers are just as likely to join the Library as those of non-manual parents, and there is no reason now for revising this conclusion. As is shown in Table I, there is no significant difference between Group I and Group II, or between Group III and Group IV, in the proportion of children registering as readers. This is true of the boys and of the girls. Such small differences as do appear are mostly in favour of children from manual workers' homes, but the total numbers involved are much too small to allow any significance to be attached to this. Much bigger are the differences between Groups I and II on the one hand and Groups III

TABLE I.

Library Membership and Volume of Borrowing among Children aged 11 years, according to Educational Attainment and Parental Occupation.

	B O Y S			
	Group I	Group II	Group III	Group IV
Number in Group	10	11	11	38
Proportion Members	.60	.55	.27	.39
Average Issues per Member	36.8	27.2	7.0	13.3

	G I R L S			
	Group I	Group II	Group III	Group IV
Number in Group	7	9	12	30
Proportion Members	.86	.89	.67	.77
Average Issues per Member	24.5	33.3	23.3	22.0

Note:

- Group I: Qualified for grammar school; Non-manual parents
 Group II: Qualified for grammar school; Manual parents
 Group III: Qualified for secondary modern; Non-manual parents
 Group IV: Qualified for secondary modern; Manual parents

and IV on the other. In short, this evidence bears out our earlier conclusion that library membership among children of this age depends more on educational attainment than on socio-economic status.

Table I, however, also gives the average number of books borrowed by Library members in each group, and again the gap between Group I and Group III and between Group II and Group IV is in each case bigger than between Group I and Group II, or between Group III and Group IV. In other words, at this age at least, the amount of reading a child does while a member of the Library also depends more on his or her level of educational attainment than on socio-economic background.

This does not mean that the home background can be disregarded. When the figures for Group I are compared with those for Group II, it appears that the boys from middle-class homes borrow appreciably more than do boys from working-class homes, but that among the girls the position is reversed;¹ among the less able scholars of Groups III and IV, however, the differences between readers with different social backgrounds are considerably smaller. This implies that the socio-economic status of the home has an important bearing upon the extent of a

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1. For the boys and girls alike, the differences between Groups I and II are significant at the 1% level of confidence; between Groups III and IV, they are not statistically significant.

child's borrowing from the Library, but the boys are not affected by it in the same way as the girls, nor are the more successful scholars affected in the same way as the unsuccessful.

This effectively disposes of any suggestion that children's reading habits are determined in any rigid or direct fashion by environmental factors. It is a reminder, if one should be needed, that the individual may either respond to, or react against, the pressure of circumstances. One may imagine, for example, two boys from middle-class homes, the one successful in his work at school, the other not. The first may be thought of as responding readily to the encouragement he receives at home and becoming an enthusiastic reader, while the second, feeling himself to have little aptitude for the academic success upon which his parents set such store, develops an attitude of hostility to all forms of reading. Again, an able boy from a working-class home may be imagined as reacting strongly to overcome the cultural impoverishment of his environment, the lack of books and the general indifference to reading, while his less able brother quietly succumbs. All this, of course, is mere conjecture, but clearly some such explanation as this is necessary to account for the sort of paradox the evidence reveals.

We turn at this point to another question: In what ways do the books chosen by middle-class readers differ from those of working-class children with a similar standard of educational attainment? The former, so the argument runs, have had

TABLE II

External Features of Books issued to Children aged 11 years, according to Educational Attainment and Parental Occupation.

	B O Y S			
	Group I	Group II	Group III	Group IV
Number of Books Issued	221	163	21	199
Percent Octavo	91	90	100	92
Median Type Size	13.1	12.8	12.3	13.5
Median No. of Pages	197	195	191	190
Percent Illustration	6.7	3.8	3.4	11.5
Median Reading Ease	76	76	65	81

	G I R L S			
	Group I	Group II	Group III	Group IV
Number of Books Issued	147	266	186	495
Percent Octavo	99	96	94	88
Median Type Size	13.0	13.1	13.1	14.5
Median No. of Pages	199	191	184	178
Percent Illustration	4.5	6.5	6.6	8.8
Median Reading Ease	75	79	79	79

Note: Group I: Qualified for Grammar School; Non-manual Parents
 Group II: Qualified for Grammar School; Manual Parents
 Group III: Qualified for Secondary Modern; Non-manual Parents
 Group IV: Qualified for Secondary Modern; Manual Parents

throughout their lives more encouragement and better facilities for reading, and in their homes have had more chance of acquiring a good command of language. Does this mean that towards the end of their primary school lives they customarily choose for their leisure-reading, books much more demanding than are chosen by children from less favoured homes?

The evidence is summarised in Table II. It gives, for the books borrowed by readers in each of the four groups, the percentage of them in octavo format, the median size of the print employed, the median number of pages they contain, the percentage of space given to illustration, and the median score for Reading Ease.

The details given about the books issued to the girls bear a quite straightforward interpretation. Through the four groups there is a steady decline in the percentage in octavo format, the print becomes bigger, the pages fewer, the pictures more numerous, and the language simpler. In other words, the books chosen by the girls who come from middle-class homes and who do well at school are slightly more difficult than those chosen by girls who do equally well at school but come from working-class homes; these, in turn, choose books slightly more difficult than those picked by middle-class girls who are less successful at school, and the choices of the working-class girls who are not very successful at school are the easiest of all. With very few exceptions, however, the differences are

all extremely small and give us no warrant to suppose that home influences have more than a marginal effect, if any, upon the quality of the books these girls read of their own choice.

The evidence relating to the boys' selections is more confused. There is little to choose between the books issued to the boys in Group I and those issued to Group II; the easiest books, on the whole, are those read by Group IV, but what is more surprising is that those chosen by Group III appear to be the most difficult of all. These are boys whose parents are in non-manual occupations, but who are not themselves conspicuously successful at school; few of them, as we have seen, join the Library, nor, having done so, do they borrow many books, but those they do borrow, so it now appears, are more difficult than one might expect. Whatever the explanation for this, it must be quite clear that it is not due to any advantages conferred upon these boys by their middle-class environment, since these advantages are enjoyed also by the boys in Group I, who have the additional advantage of doing well at school. If these latter read relatively simple books, it is from choice, not from necessity; it cannot be that they have had less opportunity to cultivate a taste for more difficult books.

Again and again, the evidence has shown that for their leisure-reading children tend to choose books which call for little effort, but they are capable, at need, of choosing much more difficult books on a subject in which their interest is high. And here again, in order to explain why some of these

TABLE III

Types of Books issued to Boys aged 11 years, according to Educational Attainment and Parental Occupation.

	B O Y S			
	Group I	Group II	Group III	Group IV
	%	%	%	%
<u>Fantasy</u>				
Puppet Stories	1	-	-	3
Fairy Stories	1	1	-	3
Animal Stories	5	2	-	4
<u>Juvenile Realism</u>				
Pony Stories	-	1	-	1
School Stories	-	1	-	1
Gang Stories	21	10	10	8
<u>Romance</u>				
Mystery Stories	28	25	5	45
Adventure Stories	31	48	81	13
<u>Adult Realism</u>				
Family Stories	-	1	-	6
Adolescent Novels	1	1	-	1
Career Stories	1	1	-	-
<u>Non-Fiction</u>	11	10	5	17

children appear to excel themselves, it is to the subjects in which they are interested that we must look.

In Table III, the books they borrow are divided among the same twelve categories as before, and by comparing the four groups with one another it is possible to see to what extent these children's preferences vary with their social background and their level of school achievement.

Among the boys, those in Group III are marked out from the others by virtue of the fact that their choices are restricted very largely to Adventure Stories. Only three readers and twenty-one books are involved, however, and it is obvious that it would need only one additional reader in the sample to change the entire picture. There can be no question, therefore, of basing broad or firm conclusions on so little evidence, but it is nevertheless worth asking for what possible reasons these three have chosen the kinds of books they have.

These three boys are all sons of shop-keepers of one sort or another; their intelligence scores are 118, 103 and 83 respectively; none of them has qualified for entry to the grammar school. With only four exceptions, the books they choose are all Adventure Stories. The one work of information among them is entitled "The History of Fortifications"; the one Mystery Story is called "Headlong into Adventure", and the two Gang Stories are "The General in Command" and "Return to the Reef".

There could hardly be a more clear expression of revolt against the tame and sheltered way of life of the lower middle class. These are obvious instances of children reading for emancipation, and they are typical of all who inwardly reject the pattern of existence set before them, and who express this rejection through their reading. In these three cases, it is reasonable to guess that their longing for escape is bound up with their failure to reach the standard of education usually expected of middle-class children. In other cases, the desire for emancipation may arise from different causes; we have already met children who read for emancipation in spite of coping quite successfully with their work at school. These three boys, however, seem to be at odds with their environment largely because of their lack of success at school.

The fact that these three boys choose books which are more difficult than might be expected is also now explained. Adventure stories are often among the more difficult of those written for boys, and it is their intense interest in this kind of story, rather than any superior skill in reading, which causes them to neglect the relatively easy books read by other children.

To look again at Table III is to see between the boys of Group I and Group II a notable difference in the proportion of Gang Stories and Adventure Stories read. These differences are all the more remarkable because of the great measure of similarity that otherwise exists between the two groups.

Adventure Stories are much more popular with the sons of manual workers; Gang Stories enjoy more favour with the boys from non-manual workers' homes.

Typically, the world of the Gang Story is a middle-class world. More often than not, there are quite clear indications of this: the main characters are usually the sons and daughters of the well-to-do, and bear the obvious signs of a privileged up-bringing - cultured speech and easy manners, private schools and unusual holidays. More important than these external symbols, however, is the tacit acceptance in almost all these stories of middle-class values and conventions - the respect for property, for rank, for non-manual work, for a settled and ordered way of life. Equally clearly, the Adventure Story rejects this ideal in favour of what is perhaps the older one of the pioneer, the outlaw and the warrior.

If a love of Adventure Stories often betrays an inward revolt against the pattern of life laid down for children, a fondness for Gang Stories seems to signify a certain acceptance of its basic conditions and a desire to do no more than explore its possibilities to the full. It is not difficult to believe that children from middle-class homes who do well at school should on the whole be contented with their present lot and future expectations. The values fostered by the school are in no way incompatible with those which prevail at home; these children have no reason for questioning the demands of either, or for doubting their own

ability to conform to them. On the other hand, it is easy to imagine that for working-class boys there is often a certain conflict between the basic values and assumptions of the school and those of the home, and that those who have the ability to succeed at school will tend to be most aware of the opposing pressures. In extreme cases, they cannot accept all they are taught at school without denying all that their parents stand for, and, although the dilemma may seldom be quite so acute, it must often happen that the clever working-class child feels frustrated by his home environment without being entirely satisfied at school. In short, the middle-class boy who does well at school tends to feel his daily life sufficiently fulfilling; when reading for recreation, therefore, he tends to look for relaxation only, and this leads him mainly to the Gang Story. The able working-class boy, on the other hand, in his leisure reading is more often looking for emancipation, and this takes him chiefly to Adventure Stories.

Turning to the reading of the boys in Group IV, we find among their choices an unusually high proportion of Fantasy on the one hand, and of non-fiction on the other. This seems to point to the same tendency to avoid "human" fiction as is characteristic of the very young, but which is sometimes met also in older readers of very low intelligence. It has been held to indicate weak ego organisation¹ and in some cases this may be so, while in others it may simply

1. See foot-note to Page 203.

indicate a lack of sufficient fluency to make the reading of fiction a pleasure.

This, however, does not explain why these boys prefer the Mystery Story to the Gang Story favoured by Group I and to the Adventure Story favoured by Group II. In the world of the Mystery Story, children enjoy great licence: they outwit their elders, flout their wishes and escape their clutches with impunity. It is a world in which children amply avenge on grown-ups the humiliation and subjection they endure in the real world. Younger children may be attracted to the Mystery Story mainly because it offers to them glimpses of a wider world and larger freedom, but to older children it serves chiefly as a means of compensation, and it is as such, in all probability, that it appeals so strongly to these eleven-year-old boys.

For each of these four groups, therefore, leisure reading has a somewhat different function. Within each group, of course, individuals vary widely in their choice of books and, consequently, in their underlying attitudes to leisure reading; nevertheless, because they have in common much the same social background and educational standards, their tastes in reading tend to have some common element which betokens an attitude to books, or a motive for reading, which is broadly characteristic of the entire group.

The books chosen by the three non-academic boys from middle-class homes betray, so we believe, their longing to leave home

and school behind, to see the wide world, to face the hazards and win the rewards of grown-up life. In consequence, the characters with whom they identify themselves are always adolescents or adults: the average age of the central characters in their books is 17.2 years, four years more than the average in the books chosen by the eleven-year-olds as a whole. In addition, to a much greater extent than the heroes other eleven-year-olds read about, they display the qualities of the fighter and the leader, the aggressiveness which enables them to survive among lawless men and in untamed surroundings. The adult world of these boys' imagining is violent and hazardous: almost all the books they choose have as their setting the wilds or the high seas, and in the great majority death by violence forms part of the plot. The air of violence, aggressiveness and fierce self-assertion which pervades their stories is surely symptomatic of a strong sense of frustration on their part, and this, if our diagnosis is correct, arises from their failure, whether from incapacity or disinclination, to accommodate themselves to a way of life expected of them as children of middle-class parents.

Of course, this love of Adventure Stories, and the longing for emancipation that it signifies, is by no means unusual in boys of this age. It is part of the dynamics of growth that the child becomes impatient of restrictions and reaches out in his imagination to greater freedom, and others therefore share these boys' attitude to reading, though rarely to the same degree.

Among the books read by the abler of the boys from manual workers' homes, for example, Adventure Stories are more numerous than those of any other kind, but yet amount to less than half the total, with Mystery Stories and Gang Stories - both essentially concerned with childhood - together accounting for another third. Although the heroes of Adventure Stories are almost invariably adolescents or adults, younger children usually play the main roles in the two other kinds. In consequence, the principal characters in the books chosen by these readers have an average age of 14.4 years, considerably lower than in the books chosen by the previous group, but yet high enough to give some indication of these boys' preoccupation with growing up, leaving school, and going forth to meet the outside world. At the same time, their reading does not breathe the same air of frustration. Many more of their stories, apart from having boyish characters, are set against familiar backgrounds - the countryside, village, or small town - or in a holiday environment, but what illustrates most clearly, perhaps, the difference in atmosphere is the relative absence of violence. Their heroes, certainly, are endowed with physical courage, but it is the courage of the adventurer rather than the fighter. The ruthless aggressiveness of the heroes admired by the previous group is comparatively rare in these, and this, perhaps, is best indicated by the fact that of the stories chosen by members of this group only about a third contain episodes of death by violence.

Like those of the previous group, these boys, then, look

upon leisure reading as an avenue to freedom. They share the sense of frustration which is commonly experienced by boys approaching adolescence, but their special circumstances contrive to make it more than ordinarily acute. In a sense, as we have said, they belong to two worlds and are the focus of conflicting codes, loyalties and aspirations; their very success at school threatens to separate them from their parents, from their brothers even, and from other children with a similar social background. Because they are good at school-work, they expect, and are expected, to give more time to reading than to the out-door activities in which their age-mates are quite free to join. Others enjoy already a large measure of physical freedom, and can look forward to an early release from school, and even greater independence in the future; for these, on the other hand, school and school-work fill the whole horizon, and beyond it lies the prospect, not of a life of physical effort, which, because it is their fathers', they feel proper to a man, but of another, less active and less manly way of life. The boys in Group III also read Adventure Stories, but read very little: these boys read Adventure Stories, and read a great deal. This crystallises their entire dilemma; were they less interested in school-work and the more intellectual side of life, they would not read so much; were a life of physical hardship and strenuous action not attractive, they would not choose Adventure Stories.

The boys in Group I - the good scholars from middle-class homes - are even heavier readers, and, to judge by this and

nothing else, they, more than either of the previous groups, are given to mental, rather than to physical, activity. In this they are encouraged, not only by their success at school, but also by the high status accorded in the home circle to non-manual occupations. There is no antithesis between the values inculcated by the school and those postulated by the home, or between what is expected of them by their parents and what in fact they have achieved. They have no great cause, therefore, for dissatisfaction with their present way of life, and no pressing need to escape. On the contrary, to judge from the popularity of the Gang Story, they are much more concerned than other boys of their age to enjoy the present to the full. As a result, the heroes of their books are very rarely adults; in almost a half of them, the main characters are adolescents, but in almost as many they are children of primary school age. In general, therefore, the figures with whom they identify themselves are of their own age or a little older, with an average age of only 12.8 years, 4.4 years less than the average for the heroes admired by Group III.

The background of their stories provides another indication. The following table summarises the main differences, in this respect, between their books and those chosen by boys in other groups. In it the books borrowed by each group are analysed according to the kind of setting they describe, those having the same kind of setting being shown as a percentage of the total number borrowed. From this table it is at once obvious that

stories set in holiday surroundings appeal much more to the boys in Group I than to the boys of either Group II or Group III; stories set in wild or alien settings, on the other hand, appeal to them much less.

Analysis of Issues showing Settings.

	Group I	Group II	Group III	Group IV
Type of Setting	%	%	%	%
Neighbourhood	24	24	11	33
Holiday	22	14	5	26
Remote	39	51	84	21

It is also evident that the books chosen by the boys in Group I resemble those chosen by Group IV more closely than those of either of the other groups. Like the boys in Group I, those in Group IV, although less successful at school and although coming from a different type of home, nevertheless show great interest in stories concerned with youngsters of their own age in surroundings which are both pleasant and reasonably familiar. In average age their heroes are only 12.2, younger even than those admired by Group I, and one year below the average for the eleven-year-old boys as a whole. The similarities between Groups I and IV stem from the concern they have in common to participate to the full in the pleasures of boyhood: the differences between the two reflect their unequal opportunities to share these pleasures in reality. For the clever boy from a

relatively well-off home, reading simply enhances his contentment with his lot; it offers him much the same sort of satisfactions as he already enjoys, but in fuller measure and with much less effort than in the real world. His reading therefore may be regarded essentially as a form of relaxation. For those in Group IV, on the other hand, reading serves as a remedy for failure and for deprivation. The difference between their attitude and that of boys in Group I is balanced almost exactly by the difference between the children in the Mystery Story and those in the Gang Story. In Arthur Ransome's stories, for example, the children show a degree of confidence in grown-ups, and of friendliness towards them, which contrasts sharply with the mistrust and resentment usually displayed by those in the Mystery stories of Enid Blyton. There are, in fact, similarities between the books chosen by Group I and by Group IV, but they are mainly on the surface; the atmosphere emanating from the latter is quite distinctive, though it is not always easy to produce specific and objective evidence of it. Perhaps the clearest evidence lies in their themes. An element of mystery appears in a little less than half the books they choose, but next in prominence come episodes illustrating adult hostility or intolerance towards children, and much more numerous than in any other group are stories in which children encounter problems in their home life or in their relationships with other children. Almost invariably, these stories have a happy outcome, and their readers enjoy vicariously rewards which can seldom be theirs in real life.

In comparison with the girls, the boys of this age seldom join the Library, but those who do so tend to restrict their choices to books belonging to a single category or, at most, to two or three. This goes to show that the prevailing climate of opinion is not wholly in favour of boys who join the Library, and that only those who have some strong and clear motive for doing so disregard the custom of the majority of their fellows. Turning to the girls, however, we find that the great majority are members. Some of them, no doubt, are impelled by some powerful, over-riding purpose, but others who have no strong personal need for books will nevertheless follow the prevailing fashion. As a result, individual girls are seldom as exclusive in their choice of books as boys: the type of book they choose may change from week to week, or even day to day, in response to the mood of the moment rather than to any single, more abiding need.

This eclecticism on the part of individual girls has a number of effects. The books issued to the age-group as a whole are drawn from a wider range of categories than those issued to the boys, but, since each girl tends to read from every category impartially, the differences between one reader and another are narrower than is the case with the boys. We have already had a good deal of evidence of this: individual differences in educational attainment and intelligence, for instance, appear to have much less effect upon the reading taste

TABLE IV

Types of Books issued to Girls aged 11 years, according to Educational Attainment and Parental Occupation.

	G I R L S			
	Group I %	Group II %	Group III %	Group IV %
<u>Fantasy</u>				
Puppet Stories	-	-	3	5
Fairy Stories	1	5	6	15
Animal Stories	1	7	2	5
<u>Juvenile Realism</u>				
Pony Stories	3	5	3	5
School Stories	9	9	8	6
Gang Stories	10	19	12	11
<u>Romance</u>				
Mystery Stories	36	26	36	16
Adventure Stories	7	4	10	8
<u>Adult Realism</u>				
Family Stories	14	11	10	10
Adolescent Novels	5	3	4	4
Career Stories	8	6	2	1
<u>Non-Fiction</u>	6	5	4	12

Note: Group I: Qualified for grammar school; Non-manual parents
 Group II: Qualified for grammar school; Manual parents
 Group III: Qualified for secondary modern; Non-manual parents
 Group IV: Qualified for secondary modern; Manual parents

and habits of the girls than of the boys. And now, when we come to consider the influence of different home backgrounds on their reading, we find no such marked effects as appeared among the boys.

Table IV shows how the books issued to each of the four groups are distributed among the various categories. Apart from the Mystery Story, no single category accounts for more than twenty per cent of the issues to any of the groups, and, apart from the Puppet Story, every category is represented among the issues to each one of the four. The range of choice, therefore, is virtually the same from group to group, and variations in the pattern of selection do not catch the eye at once, as was the case with the boys. There are, nevertheless, certain differences, and at least some of them support the view that children's tastes in books are coloured by their attitudes to their environment.

With each of the four groups, Mystery Stories rank first in order of popularity, but they are chosen far more often by the middle-class girls of Groups I and III than by the working-class girls of Groups II and IV. The appeal which the Mystery Story has for children of this age seems to have its roots, as we have already suggested¹, in their desire for the companionship of children of their own age, in their urge to escape over-

1. Page 59.

protective or domineering adults, and in their resentment at being excluded from the adult world. One is tempted to think - with how much justice I am not quite sure - that in comparison with working-class girls those of the middle class are subjected to much narrower supervision, that they are confined more to the home, but in spite of that have no great share in managing the household and rarely, therefore, have any sense of equality or partnership with their mothers. Undoubtedly the contrast here is over-drawn, but since the working-class family is generally larger, the home more crowded, household work much greater, and the struggle to make ends meet more obvious, it is reasonable to think that the working-class girl generally suffers less from the over-solicitude of parents, that at the same time she is more aware of her parents' anxieties and preoccupations, and that she is more often relied upon to do a woman's work. Studies of working-class family life such as those of Hoggart (1957) and Young and Willmott (1957) have stressed the enduring strength of the bond between the working-class mother and her daughter, the origins of which, we suggest, lie in the circumstances which make intimacy and co-operation between mother and young daughter almost a necessity in the poorer home. And this, we are tempted to think, is why these working-class girls show relatively little interest in Mystery Stories: they do not have the same sense of being over-protected and of being excluded from the grown-up world, and in consequence have less need of the compensation afforded by the Mystery Story.

Adventure Stories, unlike Mysteries, are low in the scale of popularity with every group, but like them are mostly borrowed by the girls from non-manual workers' homes. The girls in Group I, that is to say, borrow proportionately more of them than do girls in Group II, those in Group III more than Group IV. An interest in Adventure Stories, we have claimed, betrays a longing to achieve adult freedom and adult status. On the part of the girls, this desire also finds expression in an interest in Adolescent Novels and Career Stories, and these, too, are read more by the girls in Groups I and III than by those in Groups II and IV. In passing, it is interesting to notice that the brighter girls - those in Groups I and II - tend to prefer Adolescent Novels and Career Stories to Adventure Stories, whereas the weaker pupils of Groups III and IV enjoy Adventure Stories more. There is in the attitude of the former towards growing up a degree of practical realism missing in the less able girls. To return, however, it is difficult to say why the girls from non-manual homes should seek emancipation more than those from manual homes. It is possible, perhaps, that their home background gives them more poise, and greater confidence in their ability to face the adult world. Whether or not this is the case, it must be pointed out that judged by their reading the brighter girls from working-class homes are more mature than the less able girls from middle-class homes, and that the influence of the home is therefore far from being decisive.

If the taste for Adult Realism is more pronounced among the girls from middle-class homes, the taste for Fantasy is stronger in those of the working-class. These two facts appear to fit together, and add support to the view that the girls from better-off homes tend to be more realistic and more mature in their reading interests. Once more it must be stressed that the differences between one group and another are very small, certainly smaller than are often found between individual members of the same group. They are worth noticing, not because they justify any firm conclusions, but because they prompt so many interesting speculations which deserve investigation; they afford a glimpse of a field of study bristling with unanswered questions concerning the relationships between social class and child-rearing practices on the one hand, and emotional attitudes and their expression through reading and allied activities on the other.

Two further items in Table IV call for more than passing notice: the high percentage of Fairy Stories and the high percentage of Non-fiction among the issues to the girls in Group IV. A rather similar pattern of reading was found, in the previous chapter, among the boys and girls of very low intelligence, and again, earlier in the present chapter, among the boys of low attainment from manual workers' homes. It is characteristic, too, of very young readers, and therefore seems to be the symptom of a certain immaturity, not only in reading tastes but also possibly in emotional development. At all

events, among older readers it seems to occur most often among readers who are in some way handicapped, whether in intelligence, in educational attainment, or in their home circumstances. The kinds of books such children tend to choose seem to show a marked reluctance on their part to merge themselves with fictional characters, or to become too deeply absorbed in their affairs. It is usually accompanied by a liking for books dealing with very young children and presenting a much simplified view of life. These are all the characteristics of the kind of reading we have termed regressive.

Oddly enough, however, when we come to consider the main characters in the books they choose, it seems to be the girls in Group III who are most inclined to read about very young children. The following are the average ages of the central characters in the books issued to each group: Group I, 13.0 years; Group II, 11.7 years; Group III, 11.3 years; Group IV, 11.7 years. The figure for Group IV is misleading by itself; it fails to take into account the fact that in a high proportion of the books issued to this group, there are no human characters at all, but only toys or puppets. The reading of this group is therefore rather more childish than this figure manages to convey, and there can be no doubt at all that the girls in Group IV are far less mature in their reading tastes than those of any other group.

All too rashly, possibly, we summed up the reading of each of the four groups of boys as reading for relaxation on the part

of boys in Group I, for emancipation on the part of Groups II and III, and for compensation in the case of Group IV. When dealing with the girls, generalisations of this kind are much less justified, if for no other reason than that individual girls are seldom addicted exclusively to one type of book, whereas this is not unusual among the boys. Even among the boys, of course, reading tastes within any single group are far from homogeneous; between two members of the same group the differences are often greater than the similarities, whilst conversely between one group and another the similarities are sometimes greater than the differences. This is even more true of the girls, and for that reason we are justified in saying that socio-economic factors have much less bearing on their reading tastes than on those of the boys. It is also much more difficult in the case of the girls to point to the element that distinguishes the reading of one group from that of another. Even so, the girls in Group I - those who come from middle-class homes and who do well at school - tend to be marked off from those of other groups by their liking for older heroines and by their greater fondness for Adventure Stories, Career Stories and Adolescent Novels; they are more prone than other girls, so it would seem, to read for emancipation. What chiefly distinguishes the girls in Group II - those from working-class homes who do well at school - is their preference for heroes or heroines of their own age and their interest in Gang Stories. The vicarious experience which their books provide is not fundamentally different from their every-day experience; their fiction portrays a world not unlike the world

in which they live. Reading of this kind deserves to be thought of as relaxation because it permits the reader to enjoy more fully and with less effort the satisfactions he or she also experiences in reality. There is not much to choose between the reading of Group III and that of Group I except for the fact that the former are less mature in their tastes. This is reflected not only in their tendency to identify themselves with characters rather younger than themselves, but also in their preference for Puppet Stories and Fairy Stories over Career Stories and Adolescent Novels. There is a strong element of wishful thinking in much of their reading, in the Fairy Stories with their promise of magic powers, in the Mystery Stories with their concern with children who get the better of grown-ups, and in the Adventure Stories with their offer of heroic triumphs. All in all, therefore, these girls seem to read primarily in search of compensation. Finally, the girls in Group IV - those who are unsuccessful at school and who come from manual workers' homes - tend to be regressive in their reading. Reading is for them a means of retreating from reality. The evidence for this is in their preference for Puppet Stories, Fairy Stories and Animal Stories, and in their strong liking for non-fiction.

Our purpose in this chapter has been to discover to what extent, among eleven-year-olds, children's reading tastes and habits vary according to their social background. We accepted it as a premiss that children from middle-class homes tend to have better opportunities for reading and to receive more

encouragement to develop an interest in books, and that while the home remains the sole or dominant influence in a child's life, these advantages are likely to be decisive. We have not set out to challenge or confirm this proposition but to find out whether working-class children, if in fact they have a poorer start, continue to lag behind in reading at the end of the primary stage of education, or whether five or six years of schooling are sufficient to restore the balance. At this point the problem resolved itself into a number of relatively simple questions: Do middle-class children join the Library in greater numbers than working-class children of similar abilities? Do they borrow more books? Are the books they borrow more difficult, or in some way more mature?

The evidence presented in this chapter goes some way to provide answers to these questions. There is no reason at all for thinking that the children of manual workers are less eager to join the Library than others. Furthermore, it is not always the case that middle-class children borrow more: among the less able children there is no significant difference in their rate of borrowing between working-class readers and middle-class readers, whilst, among the more able, although middle-class boys read more, middle-class girls read less, than children of the working-class. Nor are children from non-manual homes necessarily more sophisticated in their reading. It is true that among the girls, the books chosen by those from middle-class homes tend to

be slightly more difficult than those read by girls from manual workers' homes, but these differences are very small. Among the boys, the differences are even less significant: middle-class boys of low ability tend to choose the hardest books, working-class boys of low ability the easiest, but among the abler boys class differences are completely negligible. Finally, although children of low academic attainment from working-class homes tend in some respects - in their liking for Puppet Stories and their preference for childish characters, for instance - to be appreciably less mature in their reading tastes than other children, this is not true to any great extent of working-class children who do well at school.

We are justified, therefore, in saying that at the age of eleven middle-class children are not noticeably more interested in library books than other children, nor do they habitually read more difficult and demanding books. A further question to be answered, however, is whether the books middle-class children choose to read differ in their themes and treatment from those preferred by other children. The evidence relating to this problem is, as we have seen, far from clear-cut, and in the course of our efforts to interpret its significance, it has become increasingly clear that the original question needs to be reformulated. We can envisage two main ways in which environmental factors conceivably influence children in their choice of books. In the first place, the home may be thought of as exercising a direct effect upon the reader, influencing him by

precept and example to choose certain books and subjects and to avoid others, pre-disposing him to admire certain modes of behaviour and certain personal attributes on the part of fictional characters, and to reject others. In other words, the young reader might be expected to apply to his evaluation of people and events in books a scale of values which he has acquired in the home and which is prevalent in the social class to which he belongs. But the child's environment may be regarded as having another, much less direct, bearing on his choice of books. His home, with the material conditions it provides, the opportunities it offers, the standards it assumes, and the expectations it holds, presents the child with a series of complex problems of adjustment with which he copes with varying degrees of competence. From this standpoint, what is important is not the home background as a factor in its own right so much as the child's relationship with his background, the degree to which in it he is happy or unhappy, successful or unsuccessful, frustrated or fulfilled. We must rephrase our question, therefore, in order to take into account the indirect as well as the direct effects of social background upon children's tastes in books.

We have found nothing to show that the direct effects are very great. There is nothing distinctively "working-class" about the books chosen by the children of manual workers: their heroes, for example, are not noticeably more plebeian, nor are their settings in any way less "bourgeois" than in the books chosen by non-manual children. We do not know whether or not

middle-class parents make more effort than working-class parents to supervise their children's reading at this age,¹ but we can say that if in fact they do make any greater effort, it has no obvious results. We can dismiss out of hand the notion that working-class children are in some way cruder and less cultivated in their reading tastes than other children. It is worth stressing this point because much of the recent work done on class attitudes and sub-cultures, has, although inadvertently, given renewed currency to old stereotyped conceptions of social differences, and has revived the idea that members of the working class tend, in one way or another, to be more earthy than others.

At the same time, the reader can no more be indifferent to his social background than he can be to any other important facet of his environment. But it is his attitude to his background, rather than the background in itself, which is reflected in his reading, and it is useful, perhaps, to distinguish, as Havighurst (1961) and Marsden and Jackson (1962) have done in another context, between the socially mobile and the socially static members of each class. Both have pointed out that upwardly mobile members of the working class readily adopt middle-class attitudes in all respects; it is equally probable

1. Brearley (1949) claims to have found no evidence that parents in "better-class" homes exercise more supervision than others on their children's reading. Page 91.

that downwardly mobile members of the middle class are disposed to reject middle-class values outright. We have no direct evidence on the point, but it seems reasonable to regard the working-class child who does well at school as upwardly mobile, and the middle-class child who is unsuccessful at school as downwardly mobile, whilst the middle-class child who does well at school and the working-class child who does not are both socially static. We may put this in another way and speak of middle-class children who are complacent and of others who are disgruntled, of working-class children who are aspiring and of others who are resigned.

Our examination of children's reading tastes and interests has led us, by quite another route, to propose a very similar four-fold classification. Children who find their environment adequate and fulfilling, we have suggested, tend to read for relaxation; the disgruntled read for compensation, the aspiring for emancipation, the resigned in order to find refuge. At the same time, none of these attitudes to reading is peculiar to children of one social class. Rebellious children are to be found in all walks of life, as are the ambitious, the complacent and the resigned. While the middle-class boy who fails to measure up to the demands made of him at school is very likely to be disgruntled, and to express this in his reading, this is by no means the only possible source of disgruntlement. In the same way, other children than those of the working class who are failures at school may have good reason to shun reality

and to withdraw into fantasy. We cannot therefore predict with any confidence that a child with a given social background and a given level of academic ability will read in a certain way, but we do say that a child's reading is best understood as an expression of his attitude to his circumstances. If his reading is predominantly for emancipation, then we must look to the factors in his environment which appear to him inhibiting; if his reading is habitually regressive, then we must try to understand the source of his anxieties.

Lest this be misleading, we must add that it is not usual for an individual's reading to be exclusively of one kind or another, although, as we have said, the boys tend to be more restricted in their choices than the girls. It is rarely possible to say of an individual reader that his choices manifest a state of chronic anxiety, chronic frustration, or chronic inadequacy, although in certain children this may be strongly indicated. For the most part, however, each separate act of choice is the outcome of a unique combination of factors; the mood of the moment, the passing interest, the immediate problem and a host of other imponderables may go to determine which book will be picked at any time, and the more permanent dispositions and preoccupations of the reader are to be divined only from certain themes and motifs which recur insistently in his reading over a long period.

Another qualification must be made. Reading is, in any case, only a part of a child's response to his environment, and to assess it in isolation from his total behaviour might lead to false views of the role his reading plays in his life. For some, quite obviously, it plays a major part in their attempts to accommodate themselves to life's demands; for others it serves only trivial functions. Not inconceivably, therefore, we might find at one extreme a child who displays a justifiable confidence in real life but whose reading, regarded separately, might seem to reveal acute anxiety, and at the other extreme a child whose reading gives no sign of the deep disturbances that are obvious in the rest of his behaviour. Two things are implied in this. In the first place, it would be wrong to regard a child's reading as the sole, or even as an important, symptom of his emotional state and outlook, helpful though we believe the evidence might be in reaching an assessment. And secondly, a child's reading must ultimately be judged in the context of the child's own life, and by its effects upon his mode of dealing with his life. From a standpoint other than the strictly academic, what is important is not what a child reads but how he lives, and when it falls to us to prescribe books for children, we should be guided not so much by our assessment of a book's literary worth as by our judgement of its relevance to the reader's situation and his needs.

CHAPTER XI

Leisure Reading and Individuality

Our attempts to assess the influence of various factors upon children's reading have led us to accept as completely just a prediction made by Wollner. "It is highly probable", she wrote, "that each child would show a unique pattern of voluntary reading, because a child's reading, far from being related to a single factor or combinations of a few factors, depends upon complex inter-relationships among many factors - hereditary, environmental, and maturational In other words, voluntary reading is an expression of individuality." ¹

A single example may serve to illustrate this complexity and the nature of the problems to which it gives rise.

In the last chapter, an attempt was made to discover to what extent children's reading tastes and habits vary according to the social and economic circumstances of their homes. Homes differ from one another, however, in many other ways than the purely socio-economic: the material comforts that the home affords and the conventional standards it reflects depend, no doubt, to a

1. Wollner, (1949) p. 80.

large degree upon the occupational status and class allegiance of the parents, but whether it provides its members with a stable, happy and stimulating environment depends on other, more intangible and less measurable, factors. Moreover, to confine our attention to the economic aspects of the home is to consider only the parents' contribution, and to ignore the part played in a child's experience of family life by the other children in it.

It is easy enough to count the children in a family, but it is worth doing so only if the number of brothers and sisters a child has is likely to have some bearing on his attitude to reading. There appear to be a number of ways in which the presence or absence of other children in the home might affect the amount of reading a child habitually does and the kind of books he or she is disposed to choose.

It is likely, as was suggested earlier, that a child has less time and less inclination for reading, when there are other children in the family with whom to share his leisure. In the large family, the would-be reader may encounter a good deal of distraction: the daughter growing out of childhood may be called upon to help with younger children; the boy will often join his brothers out of doors. In small families, on the other hand, growing boys and girls are thrown for entertainment on their own resources; few domestic duties are expected of them, and few distractions hamper those who wish to read. There is the still more obvious possibility, of course, that a child who has

brothers or sisters need not visit the library often, or for that matter need not join at all, but may rely upon the books the other children borrow.

These are the more obvious and direct consequences, for the child's reading, of the presence or absence of other children in the family. Much more interesting, but far more difficult to foresee, are the possible effects upon the child's motives for reading. It may help us to a clearer idea of what these effects might be to contrast the situation of the only child with that of the child who is a member of what the Crowther Report terms an 'all-through' family, a family which has, in addition to the parents, members of either sex spanning a wide range of ages.

The latter kind of family, the Crowther Report goes on to say, acts as a school for personal responsibility and informal education in which the growing child has opportunities to learn of birth, death, courtship and marriage, and to observe the wide variety of rôles which human beings may be called upon to play. Children from such homes as these, it may be thought, have little need of the vicarious experience which fiction can supply. The only child, on the other hand, the growing child whose brothers and sisters have all left home, the girl who has brothers only, and the boy who has sisters but no brothers, are all to some degree isolated in the family. For these, it seems very likely, books offer companionship where no other is afforded in the home, and a source of experience which they have no opportunity of

gaining at first hand.

The 'all-through' family commonplace in Victorian times has become a rarity in our day. The nearest equivalent is the family in which the children span a wide age-range and include members of either sex. For our purposes, then, an 'all-through' family might be regarded as one in which, in addition to the eleven- or twelve-year-old, there are both boys and girls, some below school age and others old enough to have left school. Such a family offers some semblance of the range and variety of the 'all-through' family described by Crowther, and stands out in the sharpest possible contrast to the family in which the eleven- or twelve-year-old is the only child. If our reasoning is correct, children with such widely different home backgrounds should have widely different reading tastes and habits. The single children, so we estimate, should join the Library in greater numbers and should borrow more books than do children from 'all-through' families. The former, moreover, should show more interest in books which offer them vicarious experience of family life and of the companionship of other children.

In order to discover whether the family structure does in fact have these effects, we need to eliminate the influence of other factors. Ideally, in order to control all other variables, we should compare the reading of single children with that of children from 'all-through' families matched with them in respect of age, sex, intelligence, educational attainment and social

class. It is well established, however, that the larger the family, the lower is likely to be the level of intelligence and educational attainment of its members, and the more likely is it to be a manual rather than a non-manual working-class family. In practice, remarkably few of the children from the 'all-through' families in our sample gain admission to the grammar school, and, conversely, very few of the singletons enter the secondary modern school. Were our children to be subdivided, not only according to age and sex, but also in accordance with their educational standard, the resulting groups would be too small, despite the fact that our original sample includes all the eligible children in the area.

An alternative method is to rely upon more sophisticated statistical techniques based on multiple correlations. However, it is possible to calculate the correlation between two variables only when both are, or can be assumed to be, distributed roughly in accordance with the curve of normal distribution. This is true of intelligence, of educational attainment, and of a great number of other factors, but it is emphatically not the case with the number of books children borrow from the Library.¹ A very high proportion of children borrow none at all, many others borrow a dozen or less, whereas

1. See Appendix, Tables 2a and 2b.

the occasional voracious reader may borrow a hundred books or more. This results in a distribution graph which is both skewed and truncated, and therefore unsuited to this kind of statistical treatment.

The size and structure of the family is but one of the many factors whose influence on children's reading still remains to be assessed, and we have dwelt upon it only to illustrate the kinds of difficulty which are likely to beset attempts which may be made in future to analyse the effects of other factors.

A piece-meal approach seems to offer the best hope of a successful outcome. The present study has limited itself to considering the effects of age, sex, intelligence, educational attainment and parental occupation. These are the most obvious, but by no means necessarily the most vital factors. Personal attributes other than age, sex or intelligence, environmental conditions other than social class or educational opportunity, are likely to prove at least as important.

It is well known that the sense of insecurity which results from the broken home has widespread consequences for a child's behaviour, and it is distinctly likely that an unstable background of this kind will profoundly affect the needs which a child seeks to satisfy through reading. Will children who are deprived in this way tend to regard books as offering some form of compensation? Will they be more addicted to reading than are other children? Are they prone to choose books which in some

way give them a vicarious experience of security? Wollner (1949)¹ provides some evidence, which, although not directly concerned with broken homes, sheds some light on the effects of emotional deprivation on the reader. This, she claims, sometimes manifests itself in voracious, hap-hazard and indiscriminating reading. Among the children in our sample, there are very few of whom it can positively be said that they come from broken homes, and we can therefore do no more than suggest that here are questions to which it would be well worth trying to find the answers.

Beyond the confines of the family, the nature of the relationships a child forms with other people, children and grown-ups, seems likely to have an important bearing on the matter. On the surface, it would seem that the lonely child, the isolate, would be more dependent upon reading than the child who has many friends. Mitchell (1949), however, reports small but positive correlations between sociability and voluntary reading, and comes to the opposite conclusion, that the kind of child who is readily accepted by his fellows is also the kind of child who reads extensively.

We have no direct evidence to offer on this question, but one or two observations we have made in the course of this enquiry seem to be relevant.

1. Wollner (1949) p. 74.

Roughly between the ages of eight and twelve, for girls especially, reading assumes the character of a group activity. Children join together to visit the Library, to exchange books and to discuss them. At this stage, therefore, the reading habit and, for that matter, reading tastes, spread by contagion, and it is possible that the child who in this period does not mix easily with other children may remain untouched. That is not to say, however, that the child who mixes freely will become an unusually avid reader. On the contrary, it is more likely that he will conform quite closely to the practice of his fellows, both in the amount of reading that he does and in the kinds of books he reads. The pressure of prevailing customs and opinions bears strongly upon children at this stage. The cult of Enid Blyton gives an illustration. It has needed little or no encouragement from adults for the books of Enid Blyton to become virtually standard reading for children aged from eight to twelve. Children themselves have been the most effective agents in spreading the fashion, and the more closely involved the child is with his age-mates, the more likely is he to follow their example. The solitary child, on the other hand, is more likely to deviate from the common practice, possibly in reading far more or far less than is usual, possibly in reading books which are not generally popular. Children of very high intelligence, and those of very low intelligence, are equally likely, one might suppose, to find themselves excluded from the gang. When considering the reading habits of children

such as these, we found them to include some unusually keen readers, and this gives some support to the view that the child who stands apart from his age-mates is likely to read more than the socially acceptable child who adopts the standards of the group.

Linked with this question is that of the relationship between voluntary reading and other leisure activities. It seems likely, for example, that the boys read so much less than do the girls largely because so many more rival activities are available to them. In general, the child who engages in a wide variety of games and hobbies must have less time available for reading. This is the situation in which the child who has many friends or who is one of a large family must often find himself. There is some evidence,¹ at all events, that children who are given to more than the average number of play activities tend to be below average in educational attainment in general, and in reading ability in particular. It is likely to be equally true of the volume of their leisure reading. It is not, it must be added, simply a matter of time; children who can express their needs through other play activities will not have the same motive for reading.

1. Ladds, 1933, p. 10 and p. 43, Table VI.

It should already be coming clear just how difficult is likely to be the task of isolating any one of these factors. Family size and play activities, intelligence and social class, these and all others are linked to one another in a complex inter-play in which each is both cause and effect, and the personality of the child himself the unique and final outcome. So it is that to understand the child's reading is hardly less complicated a task than to understand the child himself.

This suggests another avenue of enquiry. The relationship between leisure reading and various dimensions of the personality has not, to our knowledge, been the subject of any systematic study. And yet, it is not unlikely that the introvert and extravert, for instance, differ from one another in their reading tastes and habits in a relatively constant and predictable fashion. It is possible, too, that each category of maladjustment, neurosis and delinquency has its own characteristic reading pattern which we shall some day learn to identify.

What we are in fact saying is that a child reads because reading satisfies, in some way, certain conscious or unconscious needs. It follows that if we understand these needs, we may predict with some degree of accuracy the kinds of books which will give the child most satisfaction. The converse is by no means necessarily true, of course. To know which books a child reads does not enable us infallibly to understand what causes him to choose these books. Even the simplest story has a number of

ingredients, and no two readers will look for or find in it exactly the same things. Even so, when in all or many of the books a given reader chooses, certain common elements are seen to appear, it is possible to make a likely estimate of the kind of satisfactions that he seeks, and to find confirmation of our guesses in our knowledge of the child and his circumstances. Account must be taken not only of the manifest but of the latent content of each book. Herein lies the difficulty, since for no two readers is the latent content quite the same. Each reader takes from a book, or, more properly, reads into it, what is best suited to his needs.

A process which Lesser (1960) calls "Analogizing" is at work. The reader seizes upon some parallel between the fictional situation and his own, or on some resemblance between himself and one of the characters, and thereafter the whole work begins to function as a symbolic resolution of his own predicament. If the allegory aptly represents the reader's problem, and if the solutions it proposes are acceptable, the work will make a strong appeal.

We have, in passing, tried to formulate the various motives for which children appear to read, but it may be as well now to try to bring them all together. One or other of them may be dominant in any reader, and go a long way to explain the pattern of his reading; the total pattern, however, is the outcome of a complex hierarchy of dominant and less dominant needs and

interests, some conscious, others not, to understand which, it must be emphasised, it is not enough to know the books he reads; one must also know the child.

Children read to make their universe intelligible. They look for pattern, order and consistency in the world, because without them there can be no sense of security. The child's love of rhythm, repetition and routine springs from this need for stability, and the virtue of a book lies partly in the fact that it imposes logic and system upon brute reality. This is true of works of information which explain the physical world; it is equally true of the fiction which reveals the laws which govern the behaviour of human beings. Obviously, this entails a measure of simplification. For the very young, it is necessary that the book portray the world as black and white, good and evil, obvious cause and inevitable effect; but even in the complexity of those read by older children, there is a plan and pattern not immediately apparent in the real world.

The child reads, then, to understand the significance of his own experience, to feel at home in an ordered, purposive universe. But more than that, he reads, too, to meet the future, to rehearse the problems he will meet tomorrow. Much depends, of course, on the degree of anxiety or eagerness with which the child looks forward to the future. The more apprehensive the child, the less realistic will be the image he is prepared to face. It is of the essence of all fiction that it sets reality at a safe distance,

and the younger and the less secure the child, the greater must that distance be.

In the natural order of events, anxiety gives way to confidence and finally to eager anticipation. Each of these three attitudes may express itself in a child's reading. The fears and doubts of one child reveal themselves in his preference for fantasy, in his clinging to books which restore him to the simple, satisfying world of his infancy. This we have called regressive reading. The child who moves with confidence in his world, and asks no more than to enjoy it more fully and with less effort, tends to read for relaxation. The child whose security is assured and whose capacity for experience is not temporarily sated seeks to extend his field of exploration. It is probable that there is in every healthy child a compelling urge to grow up, which finds expression in what we have described as reading for emancipation.

Essential to the business of growing up is the process of discovering one's own identity. Two things are here involved: on the one hand, the plumbing of one's own inner impulses and resources; on the other, the reviewing of the rôles it is possible to play. By projecting himself into various fictitious situations, the reader makes explicit to himself his own capacity for fear, courage, pity, cruelty, love and hate, and, by assuming in turn the identity of many different characters, finally fashions for himself his own 'self-image'. This prescribes for him the upper

limit beyond which it would be unrealistic to aspire, and the lower limit below which he cannot fall without loss of self-respect.

Between the image and reality, between aspiration and achievement, the gap is sometimes very wide. The individual who so fails to reach a just appreciation of his limitations is bound to face humiliating failures for which he is unable to forgive himself. For such a person, reading acts as a form of compensation, in which he salves his pride by taking to himself the attributes and achievements of characters in fiction. The hall-mark of such reading is usually its extravagant unreality, the gross incongruity between the reader and the character with whom he identifies. Wish-fulfilment plays some part in all children's reading: the friendless child finds friends in books, the insecure child a happy family. The need for compensation, however, is another matter. Here, the child who cannot make friends imagines herself a school-girl filmstar, the insecure child an outlaw chief. The reading, in other words, has no real relevance to the needs it ought to satisfy; it is not designed, as healthy reading is, to help the reader to come to terms with himself and with reality.

Children, even as do adults, read at different levels. If, at the deepest level, the imagination is at work investing the contents of the book with symbolic meanings, at another level the conscious mind has other more explicit aims. A child may read to exercise his skill. Very often, we have reason to suppose,

the content of the book is of no great moment to a very young child, provided that he is able to read the words. For the older reader, it is almost a condition of his enjoyment of a book that he should be able to read it with little conscious effort, and he will habitually choose for his leisure-reading books well within his reading powers. Reading, at this level, affords the child something of the same sort of satisfaction he derives from skipping, or reciting the multiplication tables; it responds to an obscure need for rhythm, regularity and continuity. It is obvious, at all events, that a work of fiction, to make its full hallucinatory effect, needs to be read almost automatically. Laborious, jerky reading does, quite literally, break the spell.

Some children seem less prepared than others to surrender to illusion. This is sometimes due, perhaps, to insufficient fluency in reading; it may also mean that such a child has too precarious a foot-hold in the real world to take the risk. For some children, in any case, all or most of their leisure reading seems to be for information. The books they choose are broadly of two kinds: those which contribute to their understanding of the world around - books on geography, sociology, science and the like - and those relating to special fields of interest - books on hobbies, sports and crafts. Almost every child reads some books of this kind, and usually there is no more to it than simple curiosity. Occasionally, however, one needs to pause and look for other motives.

The following are some of the titles borrowed by one boy aged nine: 'The children's how and why aeroplane book'; 'Insect life'; 'The boy's book of locomotives'; 'Our merchant navy'; others deal with archaeology, handicrafts, and wild life. This indifference to fiction, this apparent practicality, and this wide-ranging curiosity are by no means unusual in boys of this age. Ordinarily, one would regard it as part of the child's efforts, once he has established a firm base of security at home and in the world immediately around, to investigate the world beyond. Among the books read and enjoyed by this boy, however, appears the title, "Boo, the boy who didn't like the dark", a picture book fairly popular with five- and six-year-olds, but rarely read by older children. This must give us pause. Does this one title put all the others in a different light? Is this child entranced by the wonders of the world outside, or is he a frightened child trying to reduce all the things he fears to a series of harmless pictures in a book? It is my own opinion that the latter view is nearer the truth, but be that as it may it is clearly necessary, in this and every other instance, to look beyond the superficial content of his books to find a child's true motives for reading. Moreover, as this one example shows, the full significance of a child's reading is not to be found in the individual titles that he chooses, but in the total pattern that they make.

In interpreting these patterns we are still largely dependent on our intuition, on our sympathetic insight into the

individual reader's needs, but, it may be hoped, a clearer understanding of the ways in which reading functions and of the part it can play in a child's development will at least show us what to look for and what are the important clues.

CHAPTER XII

Leisure Reading and Linguistic Background.

No enquiry of this sort carried out in Wales can pretend to be complete if it fails to take into account the fact that an appreciable minority of children are to some degree bilingual in English and Welsh. A good deal of research has been done, notably by W.R. Jones (1955), on the reading ability in English of Welsh-speaking children, but nothing, so far as we have been able to discover, is known of their leisure-reading habits. Yet, in this connection, there are clearly a number of questions which conceivably might have an important bearing on educational policy in a bilingual country. To what extent, for instance, are children who are bilingual in their speech also bilingual in their leisure reading? Do the books a bilingual child reads in his first language differ in quantity and in quality from those he reads in his second? Do the answers to these questions depend upon age, intelligence, and facility in either language? Important though these questions are, and obviously relevant, answers based on a survey limited to a largely anglicised area can at best be tentative, and valuable more as suggesting further lines of enquiry than as offering firm conclusions.

In the event, of the eleven thousand and more issues made in the year, Welsh books accounted for a mere score, and each one of

the Welsh readers who borrowed a Welsh book also borrowed English books. Even so, the Language Questionnaire administered to every child of primary school age revealed that 17 per cent of our subjects could be regarded as to some degree bilingual, in that they customarily make use of Welsh in certain social contexts, and of English in others.¹ Of these children a substantial number, seventy-one in all, attend a primary school where Welsh is the medium of instruction, and in practice it was found that of all the children in the area these alone had very considerable opportunities for speaking Welsh. Although there are others in the area who speak Welsh at least occasionally in their homes, these pupils of the Welsh school, for whom Welsh is the language of education and of much of their social intercourse, form a distinct group with very special problems arising from their mixed linguistic background, and it is with these that we shall be concerned.

In Table I are given the numbers of these children joining the Library, together with their average rate of borrowing in both languages at each age. For purposes of comparison, it also gives the rate of borrowing for all children, English and Welsh, in each age group, as well as the number of Welsh readers to be expected were they to join the Library in the same proportion as do other children.

1. For a description of the Language Questionnaire employed, and for the method of scoring, see Jones, W.R. et al. (1957), p. 12.

TABLE I

Age	Number of Welsh Children	Number of Welsh Readers	B O Y S		
			Number of Welsh Readers expected	Average Issues (English and Welsh) per Welsh Reader.	Average Issues (All readers)
6	7	0	(1.5)	0	17.5
7	5	1	(1.9)	5.0	16.3
8	3	0	(1.5)	0	16.2
9	4	3	(2.1)	23.7	13.3
10	5	2	(2.4)	17.5	12.8
11	5	0	(2.5)	0	20.3
All	29	6	(12)	18.5	15.7

Age	Number of Welsh Children	Number of Welsh Readers	G I R L S		
			Number of Welsh Readers expected	Average Issues (English and Welsh) per Welsh Reader.	Average Issues (All Readers)
6	7	1	(2.9)	13.0	12.7
7	3	0	(1.5)	0	12.9
8	4	3	(2.1)	12.7	15.8
9	11	3	(5.5)	12.7	22.6
10	11	9	(9.8)	29.1	26.2
11	6	4	(4.5)	31.3	28.1
All	42	20	(26)	23.8	23.5

First of all, it is clear from these figures that were all these bilingual children to be excluded from our sample, the account already given of children's reading habits would not have to be modified to any great extent. It is true that they produce rather fewer library members proportionately than do other children, but over the whole age-range the difference amounts to only twelve. At the same time, the rate of borrowing on the part of Welsh children taken together differs hardly at all from that of others. There is no reason to suppose, therefore, that in this area the language question is of sufficient magnitude to have affected the broad picture of children's reading. A corollary of this, of course, is that if the numbers are too small to affect our findings, neither are they large enough to permit of any positive conclusions. They afford a glimpse, however, of what promises to be a fruitful field of study, and as such they warrant some consideration here.

Secondly, it would appear, much as one might expect, that before the age of ten Welsh-speaking children show less interest in the Library than do other children: few of them join, and those who do so borrow relatively little. This does not mean that these children read less than others. The Library, it must be borne in mind, caters essentially for English-speaking readers; although in fact it has a small collection of Welsh books for children, in absolute numbers this is very small and the range of choice available to each Welsh reader is necessarily much narrower than for the English-speaking child. A much richer

source of Welsh books is available at the school itself, provided by the Library service to schools, and in consequence the Welsh child in search of Welsh books for leisure reading is likely to depend on this rather than on the Library. Since they tend not to join the Library, it seems reasonable to suppose that, before the age of ten, Welsh-speaking children, if they read at all, read mainly books in Welsh.

From the age of ten, on the other hand, so our slender evidence would suggest, the girls tend increasingly to read English books. In the last two years of their primary school lives, they join the Library almost as readily as English-speaking children, and borrow proportionately at least as many books, despite the fact that almost all the books they borrow are in English. The same seems to be true of the boys at the ages of nine and ten, although in their case there is no evidence of much interest at the age of eleven.

Further research might reveal whether this rather sudden access of interest in English books means a reduction in the number of Welsh books these children read. There is reason to fear that this may be so, if only because of the acute shortage of Welsh books suitable for children. As the publication of Welsh books is a commercial risk, local authorities, as part of their effort to preserve the language, have in recent times given financial support to the production of children's books

in Welsh.¹ It is important that the limited funds available for this purpose should be used to the best effect, and to this end it would be well to know where the need is greatest. The evidence of the present survey seems to point to the need to make a effort to cater for the ten-year-olds, since it is at this point that Welsh books appear to lose ground to English books, but of course more research is needed to establish whether the trends apparent among bilingual children in the area under review appear in other parts of Wales.

Despite the difficulties, the shortage of Welsh books might conceivably be remedied, but it is by no means certain that this would arrest the drift of Welsh-speaking children towards English books. In a largely anglicised area such as the one under review, from about the age of ten, English tends to assume an increasingly dominant role in the lives even of children whose mother tongue is Welsh. Inevitably, from about that age, the child makes contact with increasing numbers of people outside the home and school, and thereby is obliged increasingly to use English as the language of social intercourse. This may, and often does, result in the Welsh

1. Under the "Five Counties Welsh Books Scheme", local authorities undertake to purchase for schools and libraries a guaranteed number of all children's books published in Welsh. This does not appear to have had the desired effect of stimulating output; in 1963 only 15 children's books appeared in Welsh, fewer than in previous years. See Caernarvonshire Education Committee: "The County Library, Forty-Sixth Annual Report, 1963-64", page 8.

child's losing the ability to speak his first language, and it is with the express purpose of preventing this that Local Education Authorities have established Welsh-medium primary schools in certain areas throughout Wales. It is a much-debated question whether, in the more anglicised areas, such schools can achieve the purpose for which they were designed. A great deal would seem to depend on there being available to the child a range of leisure activities permitting, or preferably demanding, the use of Welsh. Church services, concerts, films, radio and television programmes, sports organisations and youth clubs must all re-inforce the efforts of the Welsh-language school if the bilingual child is to preserve his first language into later life, and even then success is far from certain. It is to be feared that in this locality at least, to judge from the number of English books they read, Welsh-speaking children, despite being taught in a Welsh school, do not long remain immune against the prevailing anglicising influences. It is not our purpose here to discuss the desirability or otherwise of Welsh-language schools, but to show that research into the leisure reading of bilingual children might have far-reaching implications for educational policy in Wales. Indeed, it might not be too much to say that the extent to which children maintain their interest in Welsh books is a fair measure of the effectiveness of the bilingual policies to which education authorities in Wales are now committed.

To continue the examination of the evidence that is to hand, however, we turn now to the nature of the books these bilingual children choose. It might be expected that, since their education

TABLE II

Analysis of Issues to Bilingual Readers

Note: Figures in brackets are for the age-group as a whole.

	B O Y S					
	Age: 6	7	8	9	10	11
Percentage of Issues in Octavo	- (48)	20 (48)	- (69)	97 (83)	97 (84)	- (90)
Mean number of Pages	- (59)	38 (64)	- (125)	155 (190)	192 (186)	- (195)
Mean Percentage of Illustration	- (51)	50 (50)	- (18)	9 (6)	6 (7)	- (6)
Mean Size of Type	- (18.9)	20.4 (18.5)	- (14.8)	14.5 (13.5)	13.5 (13.4)	- (13.0)
Mean Reading Ease Score	- (83.3)	84.0 (83.0)	- (77.9)	77.1 (73.0)	78.2 (73.5)	- (77.0)

	G I R L S					
	Age: 6	7	8	9	10	11
Percentage of Issues in Octavo	17 (40)	- (51)	61 (64)	84 (84)	97 (92)	98 (91)
Mean number of Pages	25 (47)	- (62)	61 (90)	98 (150)	180 (180)	192 (189)
Mean Percentage of Illustration	50 (52)	- (43)	35 (26)	22 (15)	8 (8)	5 (6)
Mean Size of Type	22.5 (20.4)	- (18.8)	19.0 (17.1)	17.8 (15.0)	12.4 (13.5)	13.2 (13.3)
Mean Reading Ease Score	84.0 (83.3)	- (82.9)	80.0 (87.6)	81.7 (80.5)	81.1 (79.4)	77.5 (78.4)

has largely been through the medium of Welsh, and since in consequence they have spent relatively little time on the study of English, the English books they choose for their leisure reading would be rather less demanding than those picked by English-speaking children. Specifically, their choices might be expected to have fewer pages, more illustrations, larger type and higher scores for Reading Ease than are found in the books chosen by the generality of children of a given age. The information available on these points is summarised in Table II.

Meagre though it is, it yet may serve to illustrate the kind of information which might profitably be gathered on a wider scale, and, as it stands, it gives rise to two interesting, though necessarily extremely tentative, observations. The first is that before the age of ten or so these bilingual children choose English books which are generally easier than are chosen by monoglots of the same age. The nine-year-old boys, for instance, read books which on average have thirty-five fewer pages, three per cent more pictures, type which is one point larger, and a score for Reading Ease more than four points higher than was found customary at this age. Much the same is true of the nine-year-old girls, and, were this evidence to be relied upon, it might be concluded that the bilingual nine-year-old reads English books about as difficult as those chosen by the monoglot child of eight. The second observation, no less tentative, is that at the age of ten and upwards the differences tend to disappear. This is the case with the number of pages, the amount of illustration, and the size of type, but in respect

of Reading Ease Welsh-speaking children, even at the age of ten or eleven, appear to choose comparatively simple books.

~ This suggests a line of enquiry which might well complement, in the field of leisure reading, the work already done by Jones and others on the reading ability of bilingual children. In this respect, Jones (1955) concludes, bilingual children may be as much as ten months in arrears of monoglot English speakers even at the age of ten or eleven, but he is also of the opinion that no such handicap need result when the bilingual's everyday environment offers him sufficient contact with English. In Wales, it is the rural child, rather than the urban child, who is denied this contact, and it is probable that bilingual children resident in towns are not seriously retarded in their English reading in comparison with monoglots. As it happens, the children with whom the present enquiry is concerned are town-dwellers, and this may account for the fact, if indeed it is a fact, that by the age of ten or eleven they no longer appear backward in their leisure reading. At all events, the whole question is one which might with profit be investigated further.

Another question worth considering is whether the kinds of books enjoyed by bilingual children differ significantly in their content from those favoured by monoglots of the same age. Although children living in the same area will to some extent share a common culture, it is also to be expected that with its mother tongue a child will acquire ideals, values and aspirations different in some

TABLE III

Analysis of Issues to Bilingual Readers, showing the number of books borrowed in each class, and (in brackets) the number expected on the basis of issues to each age-group as a whole.

B O Y S							
	Age	6	7	8	9	10	11
<u>Fantasy</u>							
Puppet	-	-	4(2.8)	-	3(4.2)	2(1.0)	-
Fairy	-	-	0 (.7)	-	6(6.4)	0(1.8)	-
Animal	-	-	0 (.2)	-	4(2.1)	0 (.7)	-
<u>Juvenile Realism</u>							
School	-	-	-	-	1 (.7)	1 (.4)	-
Gang	-	-	0 (.2)	-	8 (5.0)	3(3.5)	-
Pony	-	-	-	-	-	0 (.4)	-
<u>Romance</u>							
Mystery	-	-	-	-	21(10.7)	15(7.0)	-
Adventure	-	-	-	-	22(28.4)	11(11.6)	-
<u>Adult Realism</u>							
Family	-	-	0 (.5)	-	6(2.8)	2(1.0)	-
Careers	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Novels	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<u>Non-Fiction</u>	-	-	1 (.3)	-	0(10.7)	1(8.0)	-
Total		0	5	0	71	35	0

respects from those associated with another language, and this suggests the possibility that, much as the folk-tales of the Navajo differ from those of the Flatheads,¹ the stories which appeal to Welsh-speaking children will differ from those enjoyed by others. The evidence, however, in no way bears out this suggestion, but indicates, on the contrary, an astonishing degree of similarity between the tastes of the Welsh-speaking children and the monoglots.

The figures given in Table III show how the choices made by Welsh-speaking boys are distributed among the various categories, while those in brackets give the distribution to be expected from the age-group as a whole. Thus, for example, of the 71 books borrowed by the nine-year-old bilinguals, three are Puppet stories, six are Fairy, and four are Animal stories, whereas among seventy-one books borrowed by the nine-year-olds in aggregate, one might expect to find 4.2, 6.4, 2.1 respectively. In these three categories the differences revealed are quite remarkably small, and this is the case almost throughout. In only two instances are there discrepancies worth noting: at the ages of nine and ten alike, Welsh-speaking boys choose fewer works of information than expected, and more tales of Mystery.

1. Cf. Page 118 and footnote.

This certainly indicates no profound cultural differences between the two linguistic groups; on the contrary, it seems to suggest that, despite certain differences in language, schooling, and possibly traditions, boys of a given age have in common dreams, hopes and aspirations which are reflected in a shared interest in books of certain kinds. It must be borne in mind, however, that all these children, bilinguals and monoglots alike, have sources of reading other than the Library. In particular, it would seem, the Welsh-speaking children resort to the Library almost solely for books in English, and if and when they wish to read Welsh, they look to other sources. It seems probable, too, that in the primary school stage at least, when reading for information, they tend to turn to books in Welsh, which for them has been the language of instruction, and to read English books predominantly for pleasure. This may prove to be the explanation for the absence of non-fiction among the books they borrow, but to confirm it would require an investigation of the books these children read from other sources than the Library, and a comparison between all the books they read in English and in Welsh.

Although, once again, the numbers are too small to warrant bold conclusions, the evidence regarding the girls' reading, summarised in Table IV, goes some way to sustain the broad impression already recorded, that the reading tastes of Welsh-speaking children are indistinguishable from those of English-speaking children of the same age. Between the figures for

TABLE IV

Analysis of Issues to Bilingual Readers, showing the number of books borrowed in each class, and (in brackets) the number expected on the basis of issues to each age-group as a whole.

	G I R L S.					
	Age: 6	7	8	9	10	11
<u>Fantasy</u>						
Puppet	7(7.5)	-	18(16.0)	9(6.5)	14(15.7)	0(3.8)
Fairy	0(2.0)	-	9(8.0)	7(9.1)	39(34.0)	11(11.3)
Animal	2(.8)	-	1(1.9)	1(1.1)	2(7.9)	3(5.0)
<u>Juvenile Realism</u>						
School	-	-	0(.8)	2(.8)	26(21.0)	12(12.5)
Gang	1(.5)	-	0(1.9)	4(2.7)	17(23.6)	20(15.0)
Pony	-	-	0(.4)	2(1.1)	13(10.5)	4(5.0)
<u>Romance</u>						
Mystery	0(.1)	-	2(1.9)	2(7.6)	83(78.6)	36(32.5)
Adventure	-	-	1(.8)	0(.8)	5(13.1)	15(8.8)
<u>Adult Realism</u>						
Family	2(1.4)	-	6(4.2)	8(5.2)	45(36.7)	14(13.8)
Careers	-	-	-	-	8(2.6)	1(5)
Novels	-	-	-	2(.4)	8(5.2)	9(5)
<u>Non-Fiction</u>	1(.5)	-	1(1.4)	1(2.3)	2(13.1)	0(7.5)
Total	13	0	38	38	262	125

Welsh readers and the figures given in brackets, there are remarkably few differences of any note. The outstanding exception is once more in the field of works of information; at the ages of ten and eleven, Welsh-speaking readers borrow virtually no non-fiction from the Library, whereas such books account for five or six per cent of the aggregate borrowed at these ages. Instead, these girls read proportionately more fiction - more Family stories, Careers stories and Adolescent novels at the age of ten, more Mystery and Adventure stories at the age of eleven. The significant fact here would seem to be that the Welsh-speaking children do not look to the Library for works of information, possibly because they prefer to read Welsh books for such purposes, and look elsewhere than the Library to find them. It is possible that an examination of the books they read outside the Library would bring to light other important differences, but on the present evidence there is no reason to suppose that the tastes of Welsh-speaking children differ in any way from those of monoglots.

The absence of works of information among the books borrowed by Welsh-speaking readers helps to explain two other observations. Returning to Table II we see that nearly every one of the books chosen by the older of the Welsh-speaking readers is in Octavo format, and that very few indeed are in larger sizes. The explanation for this is now clear: whereas works of fiction usually appear in Octavo, larger formats are generally reserved

for works of information, and these, it now appears, are rarely chosen by Welsh-speaking children. Moreover, the language of such works is usually more difficult than in works of fiction, and this serves to explain the second observation to be made on Table II, that although in other respects the books chosen by Welsh-speaking boys aged nine and ten are very similar to those chosen by other children, in terms of Reading Ease they are on the whole much simpler. At these ages, it will be recalled, the majority of boys borrow a good deal of non-fiction, and in consequence the language of the books they choose tends on the whole to be more difficult. Unlike the majority, however, the Welsh-speaking boys borrow no non-fiction, and as a result the books they choose have a higher average score for Reading Ease.

These reflections, necessarily tentative and cautious, so far from constituting final answers, do no more (as was suggested at the outset) than raise questions which seem to call for further study, and which, to produce the answers, would require a survey broadly similar to the present one, but carried out in a predominantly Welsh-speaking area.

To summarise; on the evidence available one is disposed to think that, from about the age of ten, Welsh-speaking children tend to turn to English for their leisure reading. Is this in fact the case in areas where the library offers a more adequate selection of Welsh books? In what classes of books, and for what age-groups, is the shortage of Welsh books most acute? Is

it the case that Welsh-speaking children generally read for information in their mother tongue and read English books for recreation? If this is so, does it reflect the fact that the supply of works of information in Welsh is less inadequate than the supply of fiction, or is it simply that their command of English is insufficient to enable them to cope with non-fiction in that language?

There is reason to suspect that the shortage of Welsh books is not the whole explanation of the tendency of Welsh speakers to read English books as they grow older. Is it an inevitable result of their growing contact, after the early years of childhood, with the English-speaking community? Is there any difference, that is to say, in this respect between children living in a rural, hence virtually monoglot, Welsh area, and those living in an urban area?

Nothing has come to light which shows that Welsh-speaking children differ in their reading tastes from English-speaking children of the same age. Is it in fact the case that linguistic differences have no effect? When bilingual children have equal access to books in either language, are those they read in Welsh similar in level of difficulty, in their themes and treatment, to those they read in English?

The main difficulty in the way of finding answers to these questions is likely to arise as a result of the disparity between

the numbers of Welsh and English books available. A child with only a moderate appetite for books could well read every one of the score or so of Welsh books for children produced each year, and, since most of these are intended for the very young, the child of ten or eleven who is to any degree an avid reader may have little choice but to read English stories. In consequence, it may prove difficult to assess the true nature and extent of children's interests in Welsh books, but the effort would appear well worth making, since it might provide the key to a number of important problems in the field of bilingual education, and have a practical application to the task of preserving the Welsh language. In the light of such an enquiry, it might be possible not only to decide, as was suggested earlier, on what types of books it were best to concentrate the slender resources available for encouraging Welsh publications, but also to observe with some minuteness the process by which the Welsh-speaking child is weaned to English, and, if it be proved desirable to arrest this process, to find the most effective means of doing so. The sort of enquiry we have in mind might, therefore, yield answers on which the very survival of the Welsh language could well depend.

CHAPTER XIII

Guiding Children's Reading

We embarked on this enquiry from a profound belief in the importance of reading in children's lives, and in its potential value as a means to their intellectual, moral and emotional maturity. At the same time, it seemed chasteningly evident that the vast amount of time spent in reading instruction and in the encouragement of reading habits among children results all too often in their forsaking reading as they enter adolescence, or in their becoming, as adults, voracious readers of nothing but the trivial. It was our hope that a clearer understanding of the processes by which reading tastes and habits mature might enable us to suggest policies which would have a more successful outcome. It remains now to be seen whether any conclusions of value to the parent, the teacher and the librarian can be drawn from our investigation.

A wide discrepancy exists between what teachers, and others concerned with fostering the reading habit, believe to be the purposes to which reading ought properly to be directed, and the functions which, in practice, it performs in children's lives. We see, all too clearly perhaps, the value of reading for some obviously practical or vocational end - for information of for education, but find it difficult to concede that reading for mere recreation may have any merit other than the pleasure it affords

and the added fluency it brings. The evidence adduced in previous chapters shows this to be too narrow and superficial a conception, and draws particular attention to the important part such reading plays in children's emotional development.

The trouble has been that for social reasons reading has come to be valued for itself. Modern society demands of its citizens the ability to read, and sets itself to foster reading skills and reading habits. This, since the educational reforms of the last century, has been seen as the basic task of our primary schools, and in it they have been abetted by our public libraries, for the society which in the last century saw the need for universal literacy also saw the need to make books easily available. Teachers and librarians, therefore, in promoting reading skills and in encouraging the reading habit, have been performing a necessary social task, but in the process have sometimes adopted too restricted a view of their functions and have neglected the value of reading as a means to better living on the part of individuals and of society. This is less true perhaps of teachers than of librarians, who are sometimes heard to disclaim any responsibility for improving cultural standards, and to proclaim it as their task simply to supply the public with what it demands, with the result that the public library is in some danger of becoming just another of the agencies of mass entertainment not essentially different from the commercial cinema. Against this it needs to be asserted that reading should be much more than a pastime, that reading for reading's sake is not enough, since to

read for pleasure only, and with no other aim, is to be a slave to reading as some are slaves to eating, and that to be fully master of the reading habit is to read with conscious purpose to enhance the quality of our daily lives.

Children, at all events, expect more of their reading than mere entertainment. They read, as this enquiry has made evident, to gain increased proficiency in reading; they read, too, for information and instruction in a fairly narrow, utilitarian sense, but, if their reading serves no other purpose, these aims are not sufficient in themselves to sustain an abiding interest in books. Consider the many children who were seen to forsake the Library once they failed to gain admission to the grammar school. Presumably these children derived pleasure from their reading, but clearly they expected in addition that it would be of value to them in their school careers. When this proved vain, the pleasure books had given them was not enough to prevent their leaving the Library. At the same time, reading for mere instruction is no more likely to lead to a continuing interest in books; it seems evident that children who choose only works of information rarely develop a strong appetite for reading. It is reasonable, therefore, to conclude that it is a mistake on the part of teachers and librarians, when dealing with children of primary school age, to concentrate too narrowly upon the immediate, practical benefits of reading - on reading for information and for education in the more obvious sense; it is equally a mistake to

regard reading simply as a form of entertainment; to do either is likely ultimately to be self-defeating, since on neither can be founded an enduring and worthwhile interest in books.

Why is it, then, that some children do acquire a strong and wholesome interest in reading? What do they find in books that makes reading of abiding value to them? Our whole enquiry has turned upon this question, but the following two cases may help us to summarise our answer. Both are boys whom we first meet when they enter Standard V in their primary school. Both are of only moderate ability, and at the beginning of next year they will both find themselves in the secondary modern school. Both are members of the Public Library.

The first begins the year by borrowing Enid Blyton's 'Mystery of the hidden house'. Three months later, he is reading Enid Blyton's 'Lucky Story book'; three months later still, it is Blyton's 'Sunny Story Book', and at the end of the year he is back where he began, with Enid Blyton's 'Mystery of the hidden house'. In all he borrowed 74 books in the year, 38 of them by Blyton. In the following year, he borrowed none at all. It need not be doubted that he enjoyed his reading, but it got him nowhere, and so he gave it up. And this, perhaps, is not entirely to be regretted; others, less wise or less fortunate, fail to break the habit, but obsessively continue looking for they know not what, reading ever more futilely until at last they become incurably addicted to reading-matter of the most ephemeral kind.

Look, by way of contrast, at the second boy. He begins the year in much the same way, with Enid Blyton's 'Mystery of Tally-ho Cottage'. In the following five weeks, he runs through ten books by Enid Blyton in a row, and then moves on to other tales of mystery and adventure by John Kennett, F.W. Dixon, Eric Leyland and others, reading altogether 43 books in the year, and finishing with 'Biggles takes the case', an adventure story with an adult hero, by W.E. Johns. The following year he rejoined the Library and took out a further 27 books. Whereas the first boy's reading was static or regressive, finally to be rejected as being of no value, this second boy had stumbled by some chance upon the secret of progressive reading; his reading grew with him and played a part in the process of his growth. That, it is suggested, is why he felt reading to be important to him, and that is why his interest in books survived.

The healthy reader, then, is one whose reading is progressive, whose reading tastes change constantly to match his growing capacity to grasp ideas, his growing interest in other people, his growing urge to understand himself, his own ambitions, powers and responsibilities. Because he finds the books that are responsive to his needs, his reading is of value and he becomes a constant reader. Others, however, fail to accommodate their reading to the pace of their intellectual, emotional and imaginative development, and in consequence their

reading makes no contribution to the shaping of their lives. Some recognise it then as trivial, and look elsewhere for what they need; others accept it as a pastime, to be abandoned when a more diverting pastime offers; still others read themselves into a rut, the endlessly repetitive, unprogressive, unproductive reading of the addict.

We look to books, that is to say, in an effort to find satisfaction for certain needs within ourselves, but, it is well we should remember, reading can be both nourishment and palliative. It nourishes when it not only satisfies our needs but strengthens us for further effort; it is a palliative when it assuages our needs but leaves us no fitter than before to meet the tasks of living. The chief needs which children seek, in common with all other human beings, are for security, for status and for self-realisation. By security is meant freedom from anxiety, some understanding of, and control over, the circumstances in which one lives. Status implies the good opinion of other human beings, an assured and valued part to play among them, the self-respect that comes from an awareness of one's own significance and purpose. Self-realisation entails the recognition of oneself as similar to, but distinguished from, all other human beings, some sense of being a unique, autonomous and unfettered individual, free to grow and to develop in accordance to what one feels to be the laws of one's own nature.

Childhood, however, is an age of insecurity, of subjection and of conformity. For a brief while, the child may find complete fulfilment within the narrow confines of the home, but inexorably his needs outgrow the home's capacity to satisfy them, and at the same time he is made aware of, and is forced to adapt himself to, a world far larger than that of his immediate knowledge, more complex, more mysterious, less stable, less predictable, less subject to his personal control. He finds that the small world of his personal experience is but a poor and partial reflection of the world outside; the world into which he is born, so to speak, is no true image of the world into which he must grow. The range of experience available to him in the home comes to appear too limited; it neither challenges his curiosity nor offers scope for the exercise of his growing powers. At the same time he comes to realise that he is ill-equipped for living in a wider society; the knowledge and the skills it calls for cannot be acquired in the home, the sentiments and values learnt at home are inappropriate abroad, his attitudes and relationships to others in the family have no place in his dealings with those he meets outside. On the one hand, then, the real world, the world of his direct experience, is inadequate to his needs, nor, on the other, can it fit him for the wider world. Poised, as it were, on the edge of this wider, unknown life, the child turns to books, for reading, like play, is a sort of rehearsal for living; in it he acquires the knowledge, the skills, the self-control and self-understanding needed for his growth. In this way, his reading serves his need for

information, for education and for self-realisation, and to the extent that it meets these vital needs it also gives him pleasure. This pleasure, for the healthy reader, is an incidental gain, a by-product of the satisfaction of some deeper need, whereas to read for the sole purpose of enjoyment is a form of self-indulgence which renders the reader increasingly incapable of truly profiting from books, and does nothing to make him more effective in his daily life.

What, in effect, is here implied is that reading, as well as being a source of pleasure, cannot fail to have an effect, for good or ill, upon our daily lives, and that it is by these effects, rather than by the enjoyment it affords, that children's reading should be judged. Good reading is reading which not only gives the reader pleasure, but enables him to grow.

It is capable of doing so precisely because the world conjured up by books differs from the real world in ways which make it more apt to meet the needs of childhood. In the first place, the picture of the universe which books present may be truer and more comprehensive than the child can gather from his limited experience, and secondly, in that world he can explore, experiment, and try his powers, without fear of the disasters that might attend such efforts in the real world. At the same time, of course, the reading habit has its dangers. The image of the world which books present is not always true, and when that is so the responses learnt from books may lead to failure in reality. This is obviously the

case with books read for purposes of information or of education: the railway guide was faulty, and we therefore miss our train; the course-book was misleading, so the French we write is bad. It is no less true of books which children read for recreation: when the stories a child chooses falsify reality, distort the picture of human relations, or offer him a false scale of values, if they have any influence at all upon his life, it can only be for ill.

There is another danger, which arises from the fact that the world of books is a safe world, in which the reader may live vicariously the life he chooses, without effort and without risk. The passive reader, he who reads, not with conscious purpose, but for unconscious motives which he neither understands nor controls, comes to prefer illusion to reality; his reading then becomes an addiction, an end in itself, and its effect is not to equip him better to lead his real life but to enable him to evade the effort of meeting its demands. One can sympathise with Flaubert's *Emma Bovary* and Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, misguided though they might have been in their attempts to lead in real life the romantic existences they had read about in books. At least it can be said of them that in their lives they tried to pursue the ideals, however false, they had acquired through their reading. One can sympathise too with the woman who, in our own day, identifies herself in her imagination with the heroines of the novelettes she reads, and thereby escapes briefly from the weariness and

drabness of her daily life. For children, however, reading can do so much more that it is surely a waste of opportunity not to do everything that can be done to ensure that it is directed to better ends.

This implies, however, a measure of control over children's leisure-reading to which some may take exception on the ground that it encroaches upon one of the few remaining areas in which children are free to pursue their own devices. This objection is not to be answered lightly, since it asserts what we take to be a fundamental principle in education, the sanctity of the individual and his right to the free expression of his personality. At the same time, in education, this respect for the child as an individual does not imply a policy of laissez-faire: the teacher's role is not passive or neutral; on the contrary, he is positively committed to take what steps he may to ensure the full flowering of his charge's personality. In the field of reading, specifically, he exerts his influence in the class-room to instil habits of discrimination which he hopes will be carried over into private reading, and it is no fault of his if the effect of what is read at school is out-weighed by the sheer bulk of what is read outside. Even the average reader, it must be remembered, between five and thirteen years of age, seems to borrow from the Public Library about twenty books a year, a much larger number than he reads in class.

No violation of basic principles, therefore, is involved in

extending educational guidance to cover children's private reading. To say this, however, is not enough; some much more positive argument must be adduced to warrant interference in a child's right to follow his own inclinations. It is justifiable only to the extent that it results in his becoming, in reading as in all other matters, an autonomous, self-directing individual, one who consciously controls his own actions and decisions, and is slave neither to influences from without nor to unconscious impulses from within. Individual freedom, as an educational ideal, postulates self-knowledge and self-control; it is meaningful only to the person who has a clear understanding of his own nature, his inner needs and resources, interests and motives. It is precisely because a child's recreational reading can, and indeed often does, play so vital a part in this process of self-discovery that we believe it should not be entirely hap-hazard.

We can legitimately seek to influence children's reading, therefore, provided that our efforts are directed to ensuring that for each child leisure reading should be a process of continuous exploration. This seems to be what is meant, in the Library Association's memorandum on the duties of Children's Librarians, by the statement that "once children have been introduced to the library, the Children's Librarian has to encourage them to read adventurously and wisely." ¹ How sorely in need of guidance some children are will perhaps be illustrated by the following example.

1. The Library Association Record, Vol. 62, No. 7. July 1960. Pp. 229-230.

A ten-year-old girl brought back to the Library a book by Enid Blyton which she had taken out the previous day and had evidently much enjoyed. Finding no other Blyton on the shelves, and presumably failing to find any other book to suit her tastes, she took out again the very book she had just returned, and on three successive days the self-same thing occurred. A timely suggestion at this point might well have set this child's feet upon new paths of discovery in the world of books; without such guidance, she and many others like her inevitably confine themselves to the popular favourites tried and recommended by their friends. In watching children in the Public Library, we came to believe that very few of them had much awareness of the range and variety it had to offer. Many appeared to come to the Library with a single author or a single title in mind, and if they found immediately what they were looking for, were satisfied to range no further. If they were unsuccessful at the first attempt, however, they rarely had an alternative in view, or any way of finding what they wanted other than by examining in turn every book upon the shelves until they came on one to suit their tastes. It so happens in this Library, as in most others, that children's fiction is arranged on the shelves alphabetically by authors, the letter 'A' on shelves nearest the point of entry, the letter 'Z' at the farther end. As a result, a disproportionate number of the books borrowed by our children proved to be by authors whose names begin with letters appearing early in the alphabet, whilst authors not so favoured appear to suffer sad neglect. This is not intended as advice to would-be authors about their choice of 'nom de plume'.

but as evidence in support of the contention that children require guidance in their search for books.

Increasingly, in recent times, this kind of guidance has come to be regarded as among the most important of the duties of librarians, but clearly no librarian can hope to give personal advice to more than a few of the many children entering his library; for the rest he can do no more than ensure that on the shelves there are books to suit every reader's tastes and needs, and that his library is so sign-posted and indexed as to enable every child to find his way to what he wants. On the matter of book selection, all that can be said by way of summary is that the first aim must be to find books which will help a child to grow. Among the 1,500 children's books produced each year, some in any case must inevitably be rejected, and, on the premiss that children look to books to show them how to live, those must surely be rejected which offer them a false image of human life and false notions of the rules and values that apply in it. We shall not insist on unrelenting realism or factual accuracy, nor do we call for a return to the earnest moralising of the Victorian tale; there are, however, far too many children's books which skirt carefully round all the facts of life - birth, work, love, marriage, age and death - and which avoid any reference to human feelings other than of fear or courage. An unrelieved diet of such books cannot ultimately satisfy; for this a child needs books which illuminate his own experiences. No book, in short, is good enough for children which a grown-up

cannot read with pleasure and with profit.

On the question of sign-posting and indexing, perhaps, something else remains to be said. As has been said, it is the common practice in children's libraries to arrange works of fiction on the shelves alphabetically by authors, an arrangement which, however, affords no help to the child who is not familiar with an author or the type of books he writes. Works of non-fiction, on the other hand, are usually disposed upon the shelves in accordance with a classificatory system such as the Dewey Decimal, whereby books which are similar in content are grouped together. Once the reader has the key to this system, he can easily and without assistance find his way to the book he wants, or, in its absence, to another which will do instead. Moreover, the librarian does not need to know every book upon his shelves to be able to find one on a topic in which a reader is interested. In the adult library especially, a system of classification is of the utmost value to the librarian in the task of guiding readers to the works of information that they need, and it is worth considering whether some system of classifying fiction might be of equal value in the children's library.

To be of service to a child, such a system would have to enable him to find with ease the books which meet his needs. A book is likely to be suited to a given reader if its theme is neither too mature nor too childish, but takes him one step

forward into life; if the central character is not too old and not too young, but one with whom the reader may identify himself; if the book is not too difficult to read and not too easy, but presents him with a satisfying challenge. It seems feasible to devise a system of classifying children's books based on these three facets, and to decide upon a simple code which would summarise this information. A three-letter code might serve the purpose, so that the call-sign 'AAA', for instance, would indicate a book having as its theme the relationship between child and parent, having a young child as its central character and employing mainly pictures to convey the meaning. Beside it on the shelves might appear a book marked 'AAB' to show that, though similar to the first in theme and central character, it calls for more effort in the reading, while, further away, another bearing 'BBC' has a somewhat more mature theme, concerns an older character, and is still more difficult to read.

Two things can be said in favour of a system such as this. The first is that it may simplify for the child the search for books to suit his abilities and needs, and perhaps do something to encourage even the more conservative to attempt a systematic widening of their reading tastes. And secondly, it offers advantages to the librarian. It enables him to see, almost at a glance, the kinds of books his readers chiefly seek, and in what areas the range of choice he offers is inadequate or lacking, thus making it possible for him to judge to what

extent his library offers every child the opportunity of a balanced and progressive reading programme.

"The right book to the right child at the right time" is the goal to which our efforts to guide children's reading are directed. The task, in other words, is to put before the child the very book he needs at the moment when he most may profit from it. In order to do this, it is necessary, on the one hand, that we know our reader, his interests and capacities, and the needs he seeks to satisfy through reading, and, on the other, that we know our books, and are able to judge how apt is each to meet a reader's special needs. Because it demands this knowledge, not only of the book but of the reader, individual guidance of this kind falls within the province of the teacher or the school librarian rather than of the librarian at a public library.

An example will perhaps clarify this point and illustrate, too, what is envisaged here by guidance. One ten-year-old girl of high intelligence counts among the books she borrowed in the year such titles as Mabel Esther Allan's 'Adventure in Mayo' and 'The Amber House', Irene Byer's 'Jewel of the Jungle' and E.H. Porter's 'Miss Billy', all of them clearly indicating the girl's preoccupation with approaching adolescence. At the same time, other books she chooses - Enid Blyton's 'Sunny Story Book', 'Hollow Tree House', 'The Sea-side Family' and the like - reveal her reluctance to leave the security of

childhood. The vacillation evident in her reading, it seems likely, reflects a very real emotional confusion which, if prolonged, could hinder the process of maturing. It might help her to emerge from this confusion to be introduced at this stage to stories - certain of the Careers stories suggest themselves - which show how a new, and no less secure and satisfying, relationship can spring up between the family and the girl who is reaching out towards independence. Only a person who had an insight into her predicament, however, could effect this introduction, and the teacher or the school librarian is clearly better placed than most to do so.

It is recognised, of course, that teachers do not usually regard their responsibility for children's reading in quite this light. While the school has come to accept as one of its main functions to fit the child for healthy personal and social relationships, it has not been the practice, in this country at least, deliberately to exploit recreational reading to this end. The idea is not entirely new, however; in America, the use of popular children's fiction for rather similar purposes¹ has been strongly advocated in recent times. It has been

1. Cf. Heaton and Lewis (1955)

"The technique embodied in this volume grew from the experience of classroom teachers who, knowing the importance of stories and books to children, believed that the printed page could be used to teach attitudes as well as facts - and to teach in the process of entertaining." Foreward, Page v.

In the following pages, the authors supply lists of stories suitable for children of a given age, and grouped according to such themes as "Patterns of family life", "How it feels to grow up", "Belonging to groups".

suggested there, however, that pupils should read privately from a recommended list of children's stories, all having a bearing on some social or emotional problem deemed appropriate to their age, and that thereafter in the classroom pupils should discuss the relevance of the fictional solutions to the problem as it occurs in their own lives. One may readily accept the underlying assumption, that the reading of a story can afford a child new insight into his own difficulties, without, however, subscribing to such a formal and explicit application of the principle as is implied in this procedure. It seems obviously desirable that the books prescribed for study in the class-room should deal with themes which are of real concern to children, and that the moral, social and emotional issues that they raise should be discussed in real, and not merely literary, terms, but the literature lesson is not to be regarded as a fit occasion for group psycho-therapy of any kind, nor, in our view, should a child's private reading be drawn so far into the orbit of formal education. What we envisage is a much more informal and personal approach. A child's leisure reading must remain a private matter, and the role of the teacher or the school librarian that of an enthusiastic fellow-reader, with whom it is always easy and pleasant to discuss the books one reads, and who has the happy knack of now and then suggesting a book which proves surprisingly worthwhile. What the child himself may not realise is that the apparently casual suggestion is the outcome of careful

study of his previous reading and his present needs.

If it is accepted that this kind of guidance, designed to foster not only reading habits but personal development, is a legitimate responsibility of the teacher, it follows that he should have access to a detailed record of what each child habitually reads. In the primary school, there is much to be said for encouraging each child to keep a journal of his private reading, which he is invited to talk over with the teacher. In the secondary school, it is a fairly easy matter, if a suitable system of issuing books is used, to keep a current record of each pupil's reading from the school library, though it is less possible to know what he reads elsewhere. Records of this kind enable the teacher to reflect upon each pupil's reading experience and to make a number of useful judgements.

He will obviously consider the sheer volume of a pupil's reading, not, of course, in relation to some ideal or average amount, but in the light of what he knows of the child's reading ability and intellectual capacity, and of his other interests and activities. Broadly speaking, he will hope to find a steady growth in the number of books read from year to year as reading skill increases and interest deepens, but he will be as concerned with the child who reads too much, perhaps obsessively, as with the one who reads not at all.

Allied to this is another aspect. Ideally, as he grows older and gains fluency in reading, the child should move to

books which make more demands upon his powers of understanding. It is not forgotten that the books children read for pleasure are rarely difficult enough to stretch their reading powers, but it is clearly essential, if his interest in books is to outlast childhood, that by the age of eleven or twelve the child should be well accustomed to reading books which in level of difficulty are not far below popular works of adult fiction. Otherwise, when he enters adolescence he will find himself unable to read books on the themes and topics which are relevant to his condition. At the same time, it does not help a child to gain the speed and fluency which are necessary for the enjoyment of reading to toil laboriously through books beyond his skill, and the teacher will take pains to match the books he recommends to his pupil's known ability.

It is often the child who concentrates entirely on works of information who needs to be persuaded to read easier matter, but for other reasons, too, the teacher will seek to remedy this lack of balance and encourage the reading of a wide variety of books of fiction and non-fiction. The somewhat hap-hazard reading of works of information on a wide variety of subjects is fairly characteristic of the child of ten or so, and it clearly satisfies a natural and healthy curiosity about the world around. It often accompanies, however, a marked loss of interest in more imaginative writings and even, in some cases, a deep distrust of them, which the teacher will

discreetly try to overcome.

Besides attempting to maintain a balance between the amount of fiction and non-fiction read, he will also seek to ensure that the child's reading shows variety, in the sense that the fiction that he reads is not restricted to books of one kind or on a single theme. Boys, with their devouring appetite for Mystery and Adventure stories, are more obviously prone to this kind of conservatism; superficially, at least, girls appear much more catholic in their tastes. One of the difficulties may be, as has earlier been pointed out, a lack of books - Family stories, Careers stories and Adolescent novels especially - written specifically for boys. Boys and girls alike, however, can be obsessed with books of a certain kind or on a certain theme to the extent of not being able to advance beyond. More often than not, it manifests itself in a reluctance to progress beyond Fantasy or beyond Romance, which the teacher will endeavour to overcome by tactfully suggesting books which treat the same themes in somewhat more realistic terms.

In all this, the teacher's main concern is that his pupil's reading be continuously progressive, that in its difficulty, its themes, and in its degree of realism, it keep pace with, and indeed prepare the way for, the child's advance towards maturity. Much depends upon his having the power to win the pupil's confidence, and an intuitive ability to put himself inside the growing, questing mind, but his insight will be the sharper

for some more explicit theory to explain the motives for which children read. To ask of a child's reading to what extent it is symptomatic of a need for emancipation, compensation, recreation or regression will sometimes bring to light its unifying pattern, and so enable the teacher to anticipate, and at need to influence, the way it will unfold.

It must be stressed, of course, that the child's reading is not to be understood or judged 'in vacuo' but must be seen in the context of his whole relationship to his physical surroundings, his family, his friends, his work and play, and to himself. It is because a child's personality is so deeply implicated in his reading that there is so much to be gained from knowing what he reads. Were it not so, research into children's reading would have no more point for education than research into the sweets they eat. In a sense, to know what books they like is not what is important; what matters is that, reading quietly over their shoulder, we should come to know what they are looking for, not in books only, but in life itself. The child intent upon a story has turned his back, however briefly, on all that we, as adults, present to him as real, and, if we heed the criticism thus implied, we shall ask ourselves why what is offered him as education falls so far short of his fiction in giving to him what he manifestly seeks - mystery and adventure, exploration and discovery - and so often fails to enlist his capacities for courage and endurance, generosity and fellow-feeling, loyalty and selflessness. These

are the ideals and values which children's books affirm, and they are not by any means contemptible. On the contrary, it is our schools, and our society itself, which stand condemned if it is only through fiction that children can experience them.

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APPENDICES

TABLE 1a

Membership of the Library and Volume of Readings

BOYS

Age	(a) Number in Age Group	(b) Number of Readers	(c) Percentage readers	(d) Number of Issues	(e) Average Books per Reader
6 yrs	72	15	21	262	17.5
7 yrs	63	24	38	392	16.3
8 yrs	70	34	49	552	16.2
9 yrs	90	48	53	639	13.3
10 yrs	96	46	48	591	12.8
11 yrs	89	44	49	893	20.3
12 yrs	64	28	44	420	17.0
All	544	239	44	3,749	15.7

TABLE 1b

Membership of the Library and Volume of Reading

GIRLS

Age	(a) Number in Age Group	(b) Number of Readers	(c) Percentage Readers	(d) Number of Issues	(e) Average Books per Reader
6 yrs	59	24	41	305	12.7
7 yrs	80	40	50	517	12.9
8 yrs	57	30	53	475	15.8
9 yrs	76	38	50	860	22.6
10 yrs	87	77	89	2,021	26.2
11 yrs	73	55	75	1,564	28.4
12 yrs	79	52	66	1,698	32.6
All	511	316	62	7,440	23.5

TABLE 2a

Distribution of Issues, showing number of readers
in each age-group borrowing a given number of books.

BOYS

Issues	Age:	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	All
1 - 10		5	10	15	26	26	19	15	116
11 - 20		5	6	10	15	9	8	3	56
21 - 30		3	5	5	2	7	7	5	34
31 - 40		-	1	2	2	4	4	1	14
41 - 50		1	1	-	2	-	1	2	7
51 - 60		1	1	1	-	-	2	1	6
61 - 70				1	1		1	1	4
71 - 80							1		1
81 - 90							1		1
91 - 100									
101 - 110									
111 - 120									
121 - 130									
131 - 140									
141 - 150									
151 - 160									
161 - 170									
171 - 180									
Total Readers		15	24	34	48	46	44	28	239

TABLE 2b

Distribution of Issues, showing number of readers in each age-group borrowing a given number of books.

GIRLS

Issues	Age: 6	7	8	9	10	11	12	All
1 - 10	11	19	10	10	15	9	16	90
11 - 20	8	16	13	15	24	11	7	94
21 - 30	4	3	4	5	8	16	7	47
31 - 40		1	1	3	16	8	6	35
41 - 50	1		1		7	5	4	18
51 - 60			1	2	4	1	5	13
61 - 70		1		1	1	4	1	8
71 - 80								0
81 - 90				2			1	3
91 - 100					1	1	2	4
101 - 110							2	2
111 - 120								
121 - 130							1	1
131 - 140								
141 - 150								
151 - 160								
161 - 170					1			1
171 - 180								
Total Readers	24	40	30	38	77	55	52	316

TABLE 3a.

Analysis of Issues, showing the number of books in each class as a percentage of the total issues to each age group

BOYS

Class	6 yrs %	7 yrs %	8 yrs %	9 yrs %	10 yrs %	11 yrs %	12 yrs %
<u>Fantasy</u>							
Puppet	59	56	28	6	3	1	-
Fairy	17	13	15	9	5	2	3
Animal	3	3	3	3	2	2	2
<u>Juvenile Realism</u>							
School	-	-	-	1	1	-	1
Gang	4	4	8	7	10	12	15
Pony	-	-	1	-	1	-	-
<u>Romance</u>							
Mystery	1	2	7	15	20	32	18
Adventure	1	5	17	40	33	35	49
<u>Adult Realism</u>							
Family	9	10	7	4	3	3	1
Careers	-	-	1	-	-	1	-
Adolescent Novel	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<u>Non-Fiction</u>	6	6	13	15	23	11	10

TABLE 3b.

Analysis of Issues, showing the number of books in each class as a percentage of the total issues to each age group.

GIRLS

Class	6 yrs %	7 yrs %	8 yrs %	9 yrs %	10 yrs %	11 yrs %	12 yrs %
<u>Fantasy</u>							
Puppet	58	49	42	17	6	3	1
Fairy	16	18	21	24	13	9	5
Animal	6	5	5	3	3	4	2
<u>Juvenile Realism.</u>							
School	-	-	2	2	8	10	15
Gang	4	5	5	7	9	12	13
Pony	-	1	1	3	4	4	6
<u>Romance</u>							
Mystery	1	2	7	20	30	26	25
Adventure	-	1	2	2	5	7	5
<u>Adult Realism</u>							
Family	11	13	11	14	14	11	10
Careers	-	-	-	-	1	4	8
Adolescent Novel	-	-	-	1	2	4	7
<u>Non-Fiction</u>	4	7	4	6	5	6	3

TABLE 4

Classics among books issued to members of the Library.

<u>Author</u>	<u>Number of Titles</u>	<u>Number of times issued</u>	
		<u>To Boys</u>	<u>To Girls</u>
Alcott, Louisa M.	3	0	11
Andersen, Hans	8	2	21
Austen, Jane	1	0	2
Ballantyne	1	2	1
Blackmore	1	1	0
Barrie, Sir J.	1	0	20
Buchan, J.	3	2	3
Carroll, L.	1	0	6
Conrad, J.	1	1	0
De la Mare, W.	1	0	1
Dickens, C.	5	8	6
Dumas, A.	1	1	0
Eliot, G.	1	0	1
Grahame, K.	3	0	6
Grimm Brothers	5	8	14
Henty	2	2	0
Kingsley, C.	1	1	0
Kipling, R.	3	2	4
Lamb, C. and M.	1	2	1
Malory, Sir T.	2	2	5
Marryat	1	1	2
Melville, H.	1	5	0
Perrault, C.	1	4	5
Scott, Sir W.	1	1	0
Shakespeare, W.	3	6	2
Stevenson, R.L.	2	10	5
Beecher Stowe, H.	1	1	4
Swift, Dean	1	2	0
Thackeray, W.M.	1	0	2
Twain, Mark	1	5	7
Verne, J.	2	9	6
Wyss	1	0	2
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
	61	78	137

TABLE 5

Analysis of Non-Fiction issued to Boys
and Girls

Dewey Classification	<u>Issues to Boys</u>		<u>Issues to Girls</u>	
	No.	%	No.	%
000 General Works, Encyclopaedias etc.	13	2.7	8	2.2
100 Philosophy	2	.4	3	.8
200 Religion, Mythology, Bible Stories	17	3.6	50	13.8
300 Sociology	50	10.5	15	4.1
400 Philology	1	.2	2	.6
500 Science	111	23.3	88	24.5
600 Useful Arts	77	16.2	22	6.1
700 Fine Arts, Leisure Pursuits	114	24.0	89	24.5
800 Literature	9	1.7	27	7.5
900 History, Travel Biography	19	4.0	14	3.9
	35	7.7	18	5.0
	28	5.8	26	7.2
Total	476	100	362	100

TABLE 6a

Analysis of Issues according to Format, showing books in each format as percentage of total issues to each age-group.

BOYS

Format	6 yrs %	7 yrs %	8 yrs %	9 yrs %	10 yrs %	11 yrs %	12 yrs %
A. Short/Narrow	6	10	5	1	-	-	-
B. Medium Height/ Narrow	11	12	6	3	2	1	2
C. Long/Narrow	0.5	-	-	-	-	-	-
D. Short/Medium Width	0.5	-	-	-	-	-	-
E. Medium Height/ Medium Width	48	48	69	83	84	90	90
F. Long/Medium Width	16	12	7	3	3	1	1
G. Short/Wide	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
H. Medium Height/ Wide	-	2	1	-	-	-	-
J. Long/Wide	16	12	10	4	7	4	2
Unexamined	2	4	4	6	4	4	5
	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Note: Medium Height = $6\frac{3}{4}$ " to $8\frac{3}{4}$ "
Medium Width = $4\frac{1}{4}$ " to $5\frac{5}{8}$ "

TABLE 7a

Analysis of Issues, according to number of pages, showing books of a given size as a percentage of the total issues to each age-group.

<u>No. of pages</u>	<u>BOYS</u>						
	Age: 6 yrs %	7 yrs %	8 yrs %	9 yrs %	10 yrs %	11 yrs %	12 yrs %
1 - 19	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
20 - 39	31	23	8	2	2	1	-
40 - 59	18	21	7	2	1	-	-
60 - 79	12	11	7	2	2	1	-
80 - 99	17	14	18	8	7	3	2
100 - 119	7	4	4	3	3	2	1
120 - 139	5	7	7	8	9	8	4
140 - 159	1	2	6	8	8	6	6
160 - 179	2	3	8	9	11	9	7
180 - 199	3	5	13	17	23	26	26
200 - 219	-	1	4	11	7	8	9
220 - 239	-	1	23	6	7	8	11
240 - 259	-	2	5	12	8	16	17
260 - 279	-	-	1	1	1	1	3
280 - 299	-	-	1	1	2	1	2
Over 300	-	2	4	5	4	4	5
Unexamined	2	4	4	6	4	4	5
Median	59	64	125	190	186	195	201

TABLE 7b

Analysis of Issues, according to number of pages,
showing books of a given size as a percentage of
the total issues to each age-group.

GIRLS

<u>No. of pages</u>	Age: 6 yrs %	7 yrs %	8 yrs %	9 yrs %	10 yrs %	11 yrs %	12 yrs %
1 - 19	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
20 - 39	38	28	14	3	2	1	-
40 - 59	24	18	13	2	1	1	-
60 - 79	13	13	10	5	2	1	-
80 - 99	11	16	20	17	10	6	3
100 - 119	5	5	4	5	3	3	1
120 - 139	3	6	11	14	11	10	7
140 - 159	1	2	4	7	7	7	8
160 - 179	1	2	4	12	12	9	9
180 - 199	1	3	8	17	23	22	24
200 - 219	-	-	1	4	7	9	10
220 - 239	1	-	1	3	6	7	9
240 - 259	-	1	2	3	8	12	13
260 - 279	-	-	-	1	1	1	2
280 - 299	-	-	-	-	1	2	4
Over 300	1	1	1	4	3	4	6
Unexamined	2	4	5	3	3	2	3
Median	47	62	90	150	180	189	198

TABLE 8a

Analysis of Issues according to Illustrations,
showing percentage of issues to each age-group
containing a given proportion of illustrations.

BOYS

Amount of Illustration	6 yrs	7 yrs	8 yrs	9 yrs	10 yrs	11 yrs	12 yrs
50% and over	53	48	20	5	7	2	1
40% - 49%	7	7	4	2	4	2	1
30% - 39%	6	6	5	3	2	1	1
20% - 29%	15	11	15	8	8	5	3
10% - 19%	12	11	19	17	21	23	15
5% - 9%	4	5	14	15	15	18	17
1% - 4%	1	8	17	37	34	37	51
None	-	1	3	7	5	7	7
Unexamined	2	4	4	6	4	4	5
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Median amount of illustration	51	50	18	6	7	6	4

TABLE 8b

Analysis of Issues according to Illustrations,
showing percentage of issues to each age group
containing a given proportion of illustrations.

GIRLS

Amount of Illustration	6 yrs	7 yrs	8 yrs	9 yrs	10 yrs	11 yrs	12 yrs
50% and over	62	47	25	8	3	3	1
40% - 49%	7	7	7	2	1	2	-
30% - 39%	6	7	9	6	3	2	1
20% - 29%	12	14	17	15	8	5	3
10% - 19%	7	14	21	34	29	24	14
5% - 9%	4	5	9	18	21	22	21
1% - 4%	-	2	6	13	26	31	44
None	-	1	1	2	6	10	13
Unexamined	2	4	5	3	2	2	2
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Median Amount of Illustration	53	48	27	15	8	6	4

TABLE 9a

Analysis of Issues according to Size of Type,
showing percentage of issues to each age-group
containing type of a given size.

BOYS

Size of Type	6 yrs	7 yrs	8 yrs	9 yrs	10 yrs	11 yrs	12 yrs
10 points or less	2	2	2	4	2	1	2
11 and 12 points	5	10	24	34	37	47	44
13 and 14 "	12	14	24	34	37	31	41
15 and 16 "	16	14	14	11	13	14	7
17 and 18 "	16	11	10	5	4	2	1
19 and 20 "	16	15	10	4	2	1	-
21 and 22 "	16	16	6	1	1	-	-
23 and 24 "	5	5	3	1	-	-	-
25 and 26 "	2	2	-	-	-	-	-
27 and 28 "	3	2	1	1	-	-	-
29 and 30 "	3	2	1	-	-	-	-
Over 30 "	2	3	-	-	-	-	-
Unexamined	2	4	4	5	4	4	5
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Median size of type	18.9	18.5	14.8	13.5	13.4	13.0	13.1

TABLE 9b

Analysis of Issues according to size of Type,
showing percentage of issues to each age-group
containing type of a given size.

GIRLS

Size of Type	6 yrs	7 yrs	8 yrs	9 yrs	10 yrs	11 yrs	12 yrs
10 points or less	1	1	2	2	1	1	1
11 and 12 points	2	6	13	24	38	42	48
13 and 14 "	9	11	16	23	29	29	36
15 and 16 "	14	15	15	24	18	16	9
17 and 18 "	15	17	15	12	5	5	1
19 and 20 "	16	13	15	6	4	2	-
21 and 22 "	20	19	9	2	1	1	-
23 and 24 "	8	5	3	1	-	-	-
25 and 26 "	1	2	1	-	-	-	-
27 and 28 "	1	3	3	1	1	-	-
29 and 30 "	6	2	1	1	-	-	-
Over 30 "	4	3	1	-	-	-	-
Unexamined	2	4	5	3	3	2	3
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Median size of type	20.4	18.8	17.1	15.0	13.5	13.3	13.0

TABLE 10a

Analysis of Issues according to Reading Ease,
showing percentage of issues to each age-group
having a given Readability Score.

BOYS

Readability Score	6 yrs	7 yrs	8 yrs	9 yrs	10 yrs	11 yrs	12 yrs
90 - 100	23	23	11	5	6	8	3
80 - 89	40	37	28	23	23	31	18
70 - 79	25	25	31	26	28	26	29
60 - 69	8	7	16	23	23	18	28
50 - 59	2	3	7	11	10	8	12
40 - 49	-	-	2	4	4	3	4
30 - 39	-	-	1	2	1	1	2
20 - 29	-	-	-	-	1	-	-
10 - 19	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
0 - 9	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Unexamined	2	4	4	6	4	4	5
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Mean Read- ability Score	83	83	78	73	74	77	71

TABLE 10b

Analysis of Issues according to Reading Ease,
showing percentage of issues to each age-group
having a given Readability Score.

GIRLS

Readability Score	6 yrs	7 yrs	8 yrs	9 yrs	10 yrs	11 yrs	12 yrs
90 - 100	21	20	16	15	12	11	7
80 - 89	43	41	38	35	34	33	27
70 - 79	25	24	29	30	29	31	30
60 - 69	7	8	9	11	15	16	20
50 - 59	2	3	2	4	5	5	9
40 - 49	1	-	1	1	1	1	3
30 - 39	-	-	-	-	-	1	1
20 - 29	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
10 - 19	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
0 - 9	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Unexamined	2	4	5	3	3	2	3
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Median Read- ability Score	83	83	82	81	79	78	77

TABLE 11a

Analysis of Issues according to Flesch formula for Human Interest, showing percentage of issues to each age-group having a given Human Interest score.

BOYS

Human Interest Score	6 yrs	7 yrs	8 yrs	9 yrs	10 yrs	11 yrs	12 yrs
60 - 100 (Dramatic)	53	51	40	36	38	50	41
40 - 59 (Highly Interesting)	27	29	24	22	20	19	21
20 - 39 (Interesting)	13	11	19	22	21	19	22
10 - 19 (Mildly Interesting)	5	3	7	9	10	5	7
0 - 10 (Dull)	1	2	5	6	6	3	4
Unexamined	2	4	4	5	4	4	5
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Median Human Interest Score	62	62	54	51	48	62	54

TABLE 11b

Analysis of Issues according to Flesch formula for Human Interest, showing percentage of issues to each age-group having a given Human Interest Score.

GIRLS

Human Interest Score	6 yrs	7 yrs	8 yrs	9 yrs	10 yrs	11 yrs	12 yrs
60 - 100 (Dramatic)	53	50	49	56	59	58	52
40 - 59 (Highly Interesting)	29	31	29	21	20	19	21
20 - 39 (Interesting)	12	11	11	13	12	12	15
10 - 19 (Mildly Interesting)	4	3	5	4	4	5	5
0 - 10 (Dull)	-	1	1	2	2	4	4
Unexamined	2	4	5	3	3	2	3
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Median Human Interest Score	63	61	61	67	68	67	63