

Long Love Affair With Books Reading And The Ready Man

Editor's Note: Author Emily Kimbrough is a former fashion editor who has devoted her time to writing since her twin daughters were born. Her first book, written with Cornelia Otis Skinner, was "Our Hearts Were Young and Gay," a recollection of their trip to Europe. Her best-selling "Forty Plus and Fancy Free" was published in 1954.

By EMILY KIMBROUGH

A few weeks ago I went by train from Chicago to Los Angeles. At the end of the line a porter came into my bedroom and said apologetically, "Excuse me, Madam, but all the other passengers have left and the train is going out to the yards." With reluctance and some irritation because I was still a few pages from the end I closed my copy of "By Love Possessed." I had not realized we had reached Los Angeles, I was not aware the train had stopped.

Last Christmas my household included for the holidays my year-old grandson left in my care while his parents were abroad, and the baby's grandmother, my stepmother. During their stay I gave my annual Christmas carol party.

This occasions a violent disrupting of my apartment. Caterers move in and furniture is moved out to be replaced by rows of folding chairs. At the start of this eruption my stepmother asked how she could best help. "Mind the baby," I told her and went about my business.

I paid no further attention for some hours. What drew my attention then was not an outcry from either of them but their conspicuous position within the range of view of anyone entering the room in which the singers would later gather. It is a large room, 100 people sing carols in it at my party but at the moment of my observance it was occupied by only two.

There was no furniture except

a chair on which my stepmother sat and a canvas seat that hung between two supports. The baby in it was sound asleep, rocking in the canvas chair gently propelled by the foot of his grandmother. She did not know she was pushing the swing, that the baby was asleep, that all the furniture had been taken out of the room, nor that the caterers were noisily unpacking china in the kitchen. She was reading "The Nun's Story." The first step that I took out of the world by this blissful transportation was made when I was 11. My family some months before had moved to Chicago from the town in Indiana where I was born. As solace for a lonely little girl in a strange and big city my mother had persuaded the parents of two of my friends from home to allow them to visit me. I was very nearly hysterical with excitement at their coming.

Unfortunately for everyone but me, on the day before, I brought home from the library, "The Jungle Book." Until I began the story of the wolf's council about the acceptance of Mowgli into the pack I had wanted more than anything in the world to see my friends, but from the instant Mowgli was taken in, my friends were pushed out. I not only did not care, I scarcely knew they were there and no amount of parental dismay or threats penetrated my unawareness.

I do not know of any other experience that can effect such total detachment from one's immediate surroundings: the theater perhaps, and yet that provides its own interruptions with the lowering of a curtain at the end of an act.

Each book that one reads does not, of course, effect this swift, intoxicating passage through and beyond time and place; every introduction of one stranger to another does not effect a love affair. But when a book and reader meet and do fall in love, they do not fall out as long as the reader lives.

Editor's Note: Author Charles Van Doren is an English instructor at Columbia University who became a celebrity when he won the largest amount of money ever awarded on a TV quiz show — "Twenty-One." He recently collaborated with Ralph H. Roske on "Lincoln's Commendo," to be published this spring. He also collaborated with Clifton Fadiman in "The American Treasury."

By CHARLES VAN DOREN

One of the best things to be said for teaching is that it forces one to reread books worth rereading, and I was struck again the other day by the terms Francis Bacon uses in his famous remark

CLEAN CLOTHING

It's wise to have clothing dry cleaned or laundered before storing it away in a cedar storage closet, to be certain it is free from moth larvae. Clean clothing generally will be safe if brushed and aired for several hours before storage, but soiled or spotted garments should first be cleaned. By making sure moths have not already attacked woollens and furs, you'll gain the full moth-repellent benefits of your cedar-lined storage closet.

in "Of Studies": "Reading maketh a full man; conference a ready man; and writing an exact man." Exact means not only punctilious — able to write a clear hand and keep appointments — but signifies, I take it, having the ability to order experience, or perhaps to find order in experience. This ability is a distinguishing human characteristic. Man is prone to make myths and discover laws (natural laws and laws of nature). No cat ever had a cosmology — or cared to have one. I do not refer to man's ability to make artificial moons—I mean his theory, feeling, what you will, that some greater Artificer made all the moons that are.

What is a ready man? Readiness is also a distinguishing characteristic of humanity—I take it that it is the biological or physical phenomenon that has allowed man to spread over the face of this earth, and which perhaps will allow him to spread farther. Surely this language of man's is the key to his power. Imagine government—that institution designed to protect even the strong from the stronger—without talk. Conceive of a United Nations without debate. Insects, our only competitors for hegemony in this world, do not converse with one another — or confer, as Bacon would say — and consequently would seem to have no philosophy. But perhaps they do have one that we do not understand? I take it that a philosophy is not a philosophy unless it is comprehensible.

And reading maketh a full man. Say it to yourself in at least two ways. Accent the full — and you will see that a man without books is an empty sack, a flaccid balloon, a two-dimensional creature made of cardboard for ad-men and other demagogues to push around. Books fill you out—give you some substance. Accent the man, though, and see that Bacon means the most important thing of all—without reading, a man is not fully human—hardly a man at all! Can he be saying that to read is a natural faculty of the full man, the whole man? I think so. And he means, too, that not to read is to be some kind of monster. We would all wish to avoid that, I suppose.

Reading, talking, and writing, these three—but the greatest of these is reading.

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More To Say: Through Books

Editor's Note: Author Bonaro W. Overstreet published her first book while teaching at a junior college. With her husband, Harry A. Overstreet, she has lectured widely throughout the country in the field of mental health and human relations. They are co-authors of "The Mind Alive" and "The Mind Goes Forth."

By BONARO OVERSTREET

The hunger comes to every thoughtful person. For most, it is no steady, gnawing hunger. Intermittent, rather. And unpredictable.

It comes over a man who feels suddenly mortal because the light has gone swiftly from a winter sky, and the stars that have come are the same old stars. He thinks, "Just once, before I go . . . I wish I could know the score; I wish I could pin down what it means . . ."

It comes over a woman who, sitting across the table from her husband, looking around at the faces of her children, thinks, "This is right. This is what life is about." She reaches out to adjust the bib of the smallest child and thinks, "If I could put it down . . . if I could say exactly what it means for this one family to come together around the table at the end of a day, maybe others would understand. Maybe the human race would begin to set the drama of living above the drama of killing . . ."

In the middle of a conversation among friends—one of those conversations where the words all come right, and laughter is parent to seriousness, and seriousness parent to laughter—the hunger comes over a person who, sitting back for a moment, intimately present, but listening from a distance, says to himself, "This is too good to lose. It ought to be in a book . . ."

Always, happily, there have been some for whom the hunger was constant and compelling. Therefore, books . . .

Therefore, the man who wishes,

under the stars, that he could know the score, goes home and takes down a book, and is reminded that the heavens declare the glory of God or that the latest of many scientific theories about the origin of the universe is so-and-so.

Therefore, the woman at the table remembers one of Conrad Aiken's poems: "Music I heard with you was more than music; And bread I broke with you was more than bread. . . ."

Therefore, when the conversation of friends has been broken up by the lateness of the hour, and they have all gone home, one man—in spite of the lateness of the hour—takes down a book and continues the conversation: with a sociologist, a psychologist, a political scientist. . . .

Edwin Arlington Robinson put into the mouth of John Brown a firm, declarative statement: "I shall have more to say when I am dead." Robinson might have said it of himself; for he speaks no less clearly now than when he was alive. Or he might have said it of Euripides, Micah, Erasmus, Shakespeare, Jefferson, Lincoln. . . .

For this is the wonder of books. This is why the person who has a book in his hand can be having both a deeply private experience and a deep companionship with the human race.



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