



The World's Greatest Teacher... BOOKS

By MARK VAN DOREN

*In honor of National Library Week,
April 3 to 10, this famous educator and
writer tells us what reading
means to him and can mean to you*



Arlene Strong

IN OUR SOCIETY there is no more noticeable difference than the difference between the thoughtful and the unthoughtful person.

The specific, the distinguishing, quality of any person is the quality of his mind. And nothing does more to cultivate the mind than the reading of books.

The ability to read a book is like the ability to listen; it implies a mind that is disciplined to receive and entertain ideas. The good listener has no pride of that wrong sort which assumes that nothing further can be learned.

In the real world, there is always more to learn than even the wisest person will succeed in learning, but the sign of wisdom in him is his recognition of this fact, and his willingness to make the most of his opportunity. The good reader, like the good listener, not only knows how to use his mind; he knows how to change it. No activity is happier than the first of these; nothing is nobler than the second.

What could be more natural than the desire to own a useful or delightful book, to keep it on a private shelf, to mark it up if need be? The wise man borrows books when he has to, buys them when he can.

For it is books that change us most. The young student will listen to his teachers, but they have had their teachers, too; the books by which their intellects were formed. The parent will hope that his son or daughter may find good teachers at college, and, of course, they will be there. However, the master teachers will be the books the students read.

These never change, just as they never diminish in number. They are the everlasting teachers by which the human race has got its education.

Indeed, books stretch our minds—the most elastic thing human beings possess. The youth who forms the habit of letting books alter his thinking will never lose it, though he may exercise it less in later years.

At college, he will be expected to read books as he once read articles or stories; to take in the whole of a long argument or exposition or narrative; to keep the parts of it before him as he reads, and to see them in their natural relation; to live with an author for hours or days or weeks; to venture through new worlds as if he had a right to be there.

The world of college is many worlds, all of which may be new to the young traveler. His passport to the world of books is his desire and his ability to read. He will come back a richer person than before. He may or may not be able to tell his parents what he has seen, but they will be glad he took the journey for it will have made him the independent soul they wanted him to be.

The clearest indication of a truly educated person is the habit of buying and reading books. It is a habit he will cherish as long as he has life.

COVER:

As the camera of Dennis Hallinan reveals, a stop sign has replaced the old nursery rhyme, and April showers now bring little boys hours of blissful puddle-wandering.

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