

FILE CABINET

Classrooms have bulletin boards on which to post information and/or pictures of things that are happening currently. A file cabinet serves a different purpose. In every teacher's file cabinet there's probably one drawer which becomes the repository of "junk." But, besides the junk drawer, there's always going to be a drawer for filing away stuff from the past — appropriate pictures, worksheets, newspaper articles, whatever — things which have proven to be worthwhile and are kept on hand for future use. That's what we have in mind with our new rubric: "File Cabinet." Our file contains things which were written probably long ago, but which have not over the years lost their appropriateness. A Standard Bearer article entitled "How and What to Read," written by the late Rev. Marinus Schipper, fits that description. Though written over 45 years ago it addresses a problem of very real current concern. In fact, in light of what Mr. Dykstra said about television and reading, in "Current Issues," this article of Rev. Schipper probably speaks with more force today than it did back in 1941 when it was written. Come to think of it, the article relates well also to what Mrs. Terpstra had to say in "Parents' Corner" about building houses. But, find out for yourself. We hope you will enjoy this addition to Perspectives.

How and What to Read

Rev. Marinus Schipper

In a country where illiteracy is rare and education is not only within the grasp of almost every child but even literally forced upon them, it might seem superfluous to suggest, as my subject does, that there not only might be but actually are some, yea many, who do not know how to read.

One need not necessarily be illiterate to know not how to read. In fact, the majority of people who read have never mastered the art. Almost everyone is able to pick up a book or newspaper and assimilate its contents, but not everyone knows how to read.

Reading is an art. Ernest

Legouvé, a French teacher and lecturer on the subject, asks and answers the question as follows: "Is reading an art at all? Many doubt it. Some deny it. My opinion I give without the slightest hesitation. A careful study of the question for at least thirty years, aided by numberless and varied experiences, has convinced me that it is an art, a real art, but as difficult as it is real, and as useful as it is difficult."

Reading is an art "which entails the powers of sharing and understanding the thoughts and sympathies of great men and women who have left books as signposts on the road of culture, to guide those who stumble along the way" (Henry Guppy on the Art of Reading).

I shall have occasion in the sequence to call your attention to the fact that these "signposts" must be true signposts for us or we had better ignore them altogether. But the fact remains nevertheless that as far as the art of reading is concerned, it consists chiefly in the ability to grasp and share in the thought of the author of the material to be read. Did it ever strike you that on the shelves of a library which is worthy of the name you will find that the secular intervals of time are abridged and that generations of men meet on a single shelf? Then if you look more closely, you shall discover that all the leading

facts of life are there, the differences between men and men, with all the differences between the ages and ages of the world. If our minds are properly attuned, we shall hear the laughter and the sobs of mankind, and we shall understand as perhaps never before, something of the labors of mankind, of their successes, of their useless sacrifices of which there are so many in history, of the idle dreams with all their mischiefs.

At the same time we shall discern something of the power of books to annihilate as it were, space and time, and, like a "magic carpet" transport us into regions the most remote. It is possible by their aid to witness unharmed the great catastrophes of the world. It may be even that, though you are deprived of the opportunities of travel and exploration, yet through the medium of books you can be privileged to rove the dark continent of Africa with the Scottish explorer, David Livingstone, or with Johanna Veenstra into the heart of the Sudan.

The world of books is our common heritage, but before we can enter into it, we must gain possession of the key that unlocks it, and that key is the art of reading.

It is hardly reasonable, therefore, for anyone to expect to be able to pick up a piece of work, the result of years of thought and

experience, and hope to find in it relaxation for idle hours. Anyone who intends to read in the real sense of the word must first rid his or her mind of the idea that reading is anything but a strenuous exercise of the brain, calling into action all the appreciations of mind with the faculty of imagination.

And this art of coinciding your thoughts and your understanding with that of the author whose literature you read is an art that needs to be cultivated. Nobody cares for it to begin with, unless he is a prodigy. It is never too late to begin. I have talked with people about the matter of reading the *Standard Bearer* or other good literature. A very common expression you hear amongst our older people is, "I have no desire to read because I cannot read. If I had only started when I was younger, I might have acquired the habit." Now it is true that the great readers of the world began very early, and that what we read in early life impresses the mind more deeply than what we read later. Nevertheless a real love of reading may come late in life. It is related of a man of affairs, who had wanted all his life to read and had collected a fine library for the time when he should have leisure to enjoy it, that he found to his dismay, when the opportunity for which he had long waited came,

with his physician's order to take a few years rest from business, he could not read, because he had never learned how, and was unable to keep his mind fixed on the page. He had thought that man could read just as easily as he could walk, but he discovered that it was an art, and with shame he had to confess that he had never cultivated it. The tools were within his reach, but he could not use them. If we wish to care for reading, we must begin to read and go on reading until we really care for it.

However, when we begin to read we should read slowly and deliberately, just as a pedestrian setting out on a long journey starts at a moderate pace, quickening it as his muscles get into full play, and as his limbs become accustomed to the exercise. This suggestion may not be favorable to rapid reading at first, but it will insure thorough reading. It is not the multitude of books that gives wisdom; it is not how much we read that should concern us, but how much we retain. On the other hand, it is true that the more you read the faster you should read, and good readers are quick readers. Accordingly, Professor Cavanaugh, the Psychologist, in his observations on the subject of the pace at which we read remarks that many, perhaps most, people read too slowly, and could by a conscious effort speed up

their reading by something like 50%. And paradoxical as it may appear, quicker reading is more efficient. The quick reader understands and remembers better than the slow reader. Quick reading leads to alertness of mind. Tests have been made and have shown that the quickest readers are best at answering questions on the subject-matter of their reading. Masters in the art of reading also exhort to reading aloud. The reason for this is that the ear as well as the eye collaborates with the mind in the activity of reading and serves to aid us in remembering what we read.

Moreover, the art of reading is not yet perfected unless you are also able to read critically. Fundamental as it is to enter into the spirit of the author, this does not mean that one slavishly mumble the words of the author and cry "amen" to his every conclusion. The only Author to whose Word we shall say "Amen" is God alone. Though you may exegete His Word and with finite minds seek to analyze it, you may never hold that Word in suspicion. But for the rest the artful reader will inquire with a free exercise of his mind. You should therefore read good literature "with the admiration of intelligence and not with the wonder of ignorance." The result will be that your art of reading will broaden into the refined accomplishment of

"skipping and skimming." By this we mean that you will be able to detect the useless and uninteresting and corrupt literature which is swamping the markets. Many people read a book principally with the object of getting through it. They reach the word "finis" with the same sensation of triumph as the Indian felt when he had added a fresh scalp to his belt. This is not proper. The accomplished reader is he who speedily detects and chooses the material he really desires to read.

What is it that we should desire to read? But isn't also this question superfluous? Should this question be asked of people whose world and life view is generally Reformed and particularly Protestant Reformed?

I believe the question is not only proper but also timely. We are coming into that season of the year when more than any other we have time and occasion to read. The long winter nights keep us inside and are more opportune for reading and study than the hot, sultry days of summer. Church society life is sliding into full swing, and demanding preparation through reading and study. And not only does the season of the year lend itself to the justifiability of the question, but the time in general in which we live — the time of great world events and a time of much difference of opinion and creed.

In times such as these there is noticeably also much literature to be had. Literature that is good and bad. "Signposts" that are true and false. Books and papers also that present deceptive mixtures.

What shall we read? Well, the Reformed man knows the answer. The covenant young man and woman also knows the answer. The little children of God's covenant should be instructed in the answer if they do not already know it.

We shall read with joy only that with which not only our minds and understanding can coincide with the author's, but also our hearts. That literature only we will seek to read which shall build us up first of all spiritually and then intellectually. And though we cannot help but read much of the "stuff" that floods the mart, concerning that we shall say, "My soul loatheth it." And, "My children shall have 'bread' and not 'stones' to eat."

For you realize that we have not said enough when we described the art of reading. Reading for us is not merely a natural, intellectual activity of the mind and eye, mouth and ear whereby we assimilate the thoughts of others and criticize them. But reading for us is also a spiritual matter. The unregenerate reader may be intellectually of world renown but

spiritually he rejoices in corruption even when he reads. The child of God reads also intelligently, and develops his intellectual powers, but spiritually principally he rejoices only in the good. Should he nevertheless still find a delight in the corruption, it is not he that does so, but sin that dwelleth in him. From this sinful delight he must be converted and repent. In respect to this we shall all have to be admonished.

It is therefore proper not only to ask the question: what shall we read? but it is also proper to answer it by pointing once more to that which is good. That which is supremely good is the Scriptures which are able to enlighten the mind of our understanding to such a degree that all other literature will be judged in its light. And he who delights himself in reading the Scriptures will also be interested in developing in the truth as it has been formulated in our creeds by the church in all ages. The good reader, Reformed reader, will apply the principles of reading described above also to these. Need I remind you also how beneficial it is to read our church periodicals, the many books and pamphlets of delightful reading materials?

Most naturally, for us, first things come first and therefore we should also follow the order

just as we prescribed it above. Only then, when there is time waiting on our hands, should we broaden out in our field of reading materials. Then no harm is done or evil perpetrated if we peruse a history book, a recommended novel, or even a magazine, the possession of which will not cause you to blush when your minister or elder comes for a visit. □□



from the TEACHERS' LOUNGE

Summertime is almost upon us. "No more teachers, no more books, . . ." It always sounded so good, didn't it, to get away from all that learnin'. And yet, it wasn't really the learning itself that one longed to escape, as much as it was the structure which was necessary to facilitate formal education. A lot of informal, unstructured learning can take place in the summertime, so that a child will return to school in September with increased academic skills. That'll happen, often, whether or not conscious attempts are made by parents to encourage it. But there can be no doubt but that progress will be better if summertime learning is fostered in and by the home. We're talking, remember, about fun things, incidental learning — but things that can nevertheless be planned. What are some of those things? Parents are probably in a better position to offer suggestions for that than are teachers. But, maybe it wouldn't do any harm to listen in on some Teachers' Lounge conversation on this subject. We have for you, here, some ideas presented by primary grade and intermediate grade teachers in several of our schools. Suggestions for intermediate grade students were submitted by various of our western school teachers, and compiled, I believe, by Mr. Skip Hunter, principal in Doon. From what follows, you should be able to pick up a few ideas that'll work well in your family.