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which are well outside the control

D. TELEGRAM 8/4/64

Learning to Read at Four

Nothing Exceptional?

Sir—Is there really something exceptional about a child being able to read at the age of seven? I am perfectly certain that I could read in my fourth year and I know that my eldest daughter could read at the same age.

Only a few days ago my eldest granddaughter, aged four and a half, sat on my knee and read to me with a fair degree of fluency after only one term at school. She thus emulates her brother, who could read well at the same age and who now, at the age of seven, takes a national newspaper in his stride before breakfast; when not occupied with the pursuits normal to a boy of his age, he amuses himself with a 10-volume encyclopaedia that I gave him for Christmas.

If this seems a trifle precocious—and I am assured that it is by no means exceptional at the primary school these two children attend—it is fairly mild stuff when compared with the feat of that redoubtable woman the mother of John Wesley, who is said to have taught—or forced—her many children to read at the age of two, the instruction being by means of the Bible, in an unheated classroom, beginning at the forbidding hour of four o'clock in the morning. Yours faithfully,

H. E. BATES.

Little Chart, Kent.

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B. TELEGRAM 8/4/64

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