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## LITERATURE IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

(A paper read before the Inspectors at the meeting of the Ontario Educational Association, April, 1902.)

**T**HE value of good literature consists in its subtle enlargement of our whole nature, in sharpening the powers of observation, widening the sympathies, clearing the thought, deepening the affections, and purifying and exalting the sense of reverence. Value, also, of a more direct and valuable kind, it has, in enabling us to know something of the daily doings of one of the foremost nations, and in expressing ourselves intelligently in speech or writing. But not for these subordinate reasons alone, good enough though they are, should more time and attention be spent upon our literature; but on the ground that it contains, not perhaps for every pupil, but certainly for many of them, the clearest, fullest, most attractive, and compelling picture of what is best in the world. For a child to get its hand on such a treasure is in a very real sense to guarantee its future, to give it the best chance for the most enduring kind of enjoyment, to make him know what life really is, and to establish his faith in the goodness of the Divine Being.

I have no intention of underestimating the literature of other languages,

which are broadly of the same value to the young people who speak them as ours is for us; only that the limitation of the subject excludes all reference to foreign literatures, ancient and modern, except incidentally to translations. If any child has the opportunity of acquiring a knowledge of French or German, it would be a mistake not to seize it, but the mother tongue first—yes, first the mother *ton-gue*, because the art of speech and hearing comes before the art of reading, and the child should be well out on the broad highway of English literature before he is able to read at all.

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But it may be well in the very first place to seek to be convinced afresh that an acquaintance with English literature is a necessary part of a public school education. If belief is strong on that point, it will not be difficult, I think, to discover means.

That English literature is necessary for the edification of children is the dogma I wish to advocate, and by means of a series of illustrations drive home.

(1) The wide literature which is concerned with nature, for instance, is a splendid means for inspiring a child with a love of natural objects. The