

interpretation of a passage, and will often convey the meaning better than an elaborate commentary upon it.

The tendency of school reading is to violate all the laws of inflection, and consequently to train pupils in habits of such expressionless and monotonous reading, that they cling to all through life, and disfigure the delivery of scholars and professional men, quite as much as that of the worst educated. That tendency is generally marked by an unvarying downward inflection which bears no reference to the sense of the passage, but is a habit expressive of the relief the voice finds when coming to any pause. It is either an indication of indifference, or of ignorance of the thought expressed; because when speaking his own thoughts, which, no doubt he understands, a man who reads in the most monotonous tone never vary his tones with correct and beautiful inflection. But the bad habit grows and ultimately affects the capacity to inflect at will so deeply, that in adult life few speakers or readers, however accomplished otherwise, are able to read with correct and musical inflections. Let us remember then that as it is school habits that really begin, establish, and confirm monotonous reading, school habits may give the discipline and culture, which shall endow every pupil with the faculty of reading in after life with truthfulness, expression and beauty. The *rules* for inflection are numerous and very perplexing, adapted as far as possible to the form of the sentence, but not always consistent, and subject to exceptions. The perplexity, however, lies more in the mind of the reader, than in the inadequacy of elocutionary principles to satisfy the judgment; and the inconsistency is always only apparent and superficial, and arises from the reader being governed by the letter, by the structure, rather than the spirit of a sentence. The principle of inflection is unvarying, as are in fact all the principles of just elocution. "There are

never two equally good ways of reading a sentence, though there may be half a dozen of writing it. If one and the same sentence is readable in more than one way, it is, because it has more than one passable meaning. 'Shall you walk out to-day?' is a question which may be asked with as many variations of stress and inflection as there are words in it; but every variation involves a variation of meaning."*

It is a natural law of vocal expression, that in all unfinished and consequently all dependent thought, the voice turns upwards, that is, prefers the rising inflection; and, on the other hand, when the sense and thought are finished the voice takes a downward inflection. This is the law of speech, universal, common to all languages, and never violated until human beings are subjected to the unnatural and sense-destroying habits of school-room reading. It is very easy to insist that we should read as we speak. But in reading the scholar has difficulties to contend with that never afflict him when speaking his own thoughts. He has to speak thoughts which are not his own, and he has to form the words from arbitrary signs and combinations, which in every step demand skill and consideration. The natural tendency here then is to give the falling inflection to every difficult word, without reference to the thought or the general sense of the passage; and as each "stop" offers a momentary resting place in this laborious work, it is equally natural that the scholar should give, as he universally does, a falling inflection to the last word, without regard to the completion or independence of the thought. Sheridan, who wrote on the subject a hundred years ago, considered that the chief reason of these abuses of inflection and emphasis, "seemed to be that children were taught to read sentences which they did not understand." In the most advanced books no

*North British Review on English Metre.