

OUR CONTRIBUTORS.

HOW TO READ TO CHILDREN.

BY REV. JAMES A. R. DICKSON, D.D.

There are many fine arts cultivated with great assiduity to-day, that are well worth the attention bestowed upon them, because they refine the feelings, educate the taste, embellish the life, and stimulate the soul to a higher, nobler, purer existence. But among these there is one sadly overlooked, and one, too, that ought to be cultivated with diligence and conscientious application, because it is a grand preparative both for the appreciation and prosecution of all the others, and that is the fine art of reading to children. This is not usually regarded as a fine art, but it unquestionably is; for does it not open the eyes of the mind to see? and does it not discover beauties in the object to be seen? Is it not in the truest sense an interpreter? Does it not open up a new world to the soul? Certainly! Then it is a fine art, and as such it ought to be studied and employed; and there is this consideration touching it that ought not to be overlooked, namely, both parents and friends, both young and old, all who desire to be useful in this line of things, may without much effort become proficient in it; and exercising themselves in it there is endless encouragement, for none so well repay work on their behalf, nor are so truly grateful as the children. All who know anything of the little ones know that they love to be read to. They have an innate hunger for it. Their cry on every occasion when there is the least likelihood of it being complied with is: Tell us a story! Read us something! And they will sit still eagerly and patiently listening to even a very long reading.

Many may object, and many do object to reading to children because they say they are not able to interest them, they are not good readers; they cannot hold their attention. But what conception have all such of reading to children? In nearly every case, only the dramatic. They think only of making the reading as natural and life-like and vivid as possible, which is right; but is this enough? Not quite. Something is wanted in addition to this. What is it? It is that furnished in the educational course of Bronson Alcott, as described so graphically by Miss E. P. Peabody in her, "Record of Mr. Alcott's School."

In a recent visit to Boston, where we searched the shelves of the booksellers on Cornhill, and we came across the book just named in its "Third Edition, Revised 1874," and knowing from the judicious praise of Mr. Alcott's school by Joseph Cook, as "a school full of subtle thought," that it would well repay perusal, we eagerly seized it, bought it, and read it; and we have not been disappointed. It is worthy of a place alongside Jean Paul Richter's "Sevana," Locke "On Education"; "Home Education," by Isaac Taylor; "Education as a Science," by Alexander Bain L.L.D.; "The Science and Art of Teaching," by George Victor Le Vaux.; Roger Ascham's "The Schoolmaster," and Baroness Maxenholz-Bulow's "Contribution to the Understanding of Froebel's Educational Theories." It reveals in Mr. Alcott a profound knowledge of child-nature, and an ability to deal with it on philosophical principles, and a very encouraging success in the work, we would say a notable success. The book cannot help being to every reader of it a fount of inspiration. Among its many important teachings is found pre-eminent, this one, namely: How to read to children. We would give a few illustrative selections as the best that we can do, with this hope that many of the friends of the children, may learn from them the secret of a grand educative power, and the source of an undying pleasure. "Mr. Alcott thinks," observes Miss Peabody, "that every book read should be an event to a child; and all his plans of teaching kept steadily in view, the object of making books live, breathe and speak; and he considers the glib-reading which we hear in some schools as a preventative rather than an aid to his purposes. He has himself no doubt as to the ultimate result, not only upon the intellectual powers, but upon the very enunciation of the words, which cannot fail to borrow energy and life from the thoughts and feelings they awaken within the soul of the reader." Here is a handful of illustrations, "He read from Thomson's 'Winter' 'The Freezing Shepherd,' and asked, what was that about? One said, about a man freezing to death in a snow-storm. Another said, about winter. What pictures came up in your minds most vividly? A very little boy said, a

cottage of little children crying. And so the rest. Mr. Alcott then began to read the same story again, in a paraphrase, as most of the children seemed not to have taken clear ideas or pictures from the poet's own words. They all expressed afterwards how much better it was in the paraphrase."

The "Faery Queens" was opened, and Mr. Alcott began, "Goodness may be said to be at war with Wickedness, and Spencer has pictured out Goodness as a knight who goes forth into the world to combat with enemies. When I read about St. George, you may understand that he represents Goodness, his enemies are the enemies of goodness. I shall first read about St. George's combatting with Error, one of the first enemies that Goodness meets in the world. He then read or rather paraphrased the description of Una, and told them that she represented Truth. She 'inly mourned' because wickedness and error existed, she was 'in white' because truth is pure, bright and innocent. He read the account of the Wood of Error and the adventure in it, in a very free paraphrase interweaving the explanation of the allegory. They listened with the most intense interest, and could not help exclaiming, as they sympathized in the various turns of the battle. At the end of the battle he stopped and asked them if he should go on; and they all exclaimed, go on! go on! He went on and read of the meeting with Hypocrisy, up to the scene in the House of Sleep. When he had finished, he asks what has this taught you? One boy said, to resist evil. Mr. Alcott then went on to speak of the conflict of good and evil within themselves, and made individual applications which brought the subject home to each one's own experience.

"Mr. Alcott read in 'Frank', and he asked the children what pictures certain words brought up to their minds, and had several interesting answers. One boy said TRY shaped itself as a strong man. And another of five gave quite an elaborate picture of DAY. He said he thought of an angel sitting on the floor of heaven which was our sky, and letting down through an opening a cross in which was the sun. When he lets down the cross it is day, and when he draws it up it is night. He made appropriate gestures as he described this. Where did you get that picture? It came into my mind all of itself. When? Why, now. Did you ever think of that picture before today? No. In regard to some other particulars which were asked in order to ascertain if it was distinct and steady before his mind, he answered without hesitation."

These will show how Mr. Bronson Alcott read to the children in his school in Boston, about forty years ago. And we are sure a better system never obtained anywhere. It calls into play self control, and the active powers of the mind, the memory, the imagination and the judgment. It furnishes the mind with good, it sharpens the judgment, it stores the memory, it awakens and exercises the imagination. What far-reaching culture lies in it! and it has this recommendation, that being pointed out, explained, it lies within the reach of any ordinary intelligence. If thoughtful preparation is demanded to read such authors as Mr. Alcott read, no true lover of the children will grudge it.

SCRIPTURAL LAND LAWS.

LAND TENURE IN BIBLE TIMES.

Mr. William Brown, Montreal, author of the "Land Catechism" has forwarded the following for publication:

MR. EDITOR,—I am glad to see that attention is called to the great importance of the study of the land laws of the Bible as needful to a right understanding of a true system of land tenure, and as preparatory to a satisfactory solution of the great economic question which is now agitating all nations.

The statement is made that Mr. R. Reid, of Kirk-intiloch, in an article just published in the "Catholic Presbyterian" has been the first to draw public attention to this phase of the discussion. This is hardly correct. In my work, "The Land Catechism," and which bears the sub-title, "Is Rent Just? What Political Economy Teaches Regarding It," published by subscription in the winter of 1880-81, I have gone thoroughly into the question of the Bible Land Laws, and in the earlier portion of the book have devoted quite a number of pages to this important study. These laws, as exhibiting and demonstrating to the human race, the mind of the Most High with reference

to the land—its division, proprietorship, and tenure—as well as its use, culture and economy, form indeed a noble and interesting subject of investigation. They have engaged my close attention for many years, and I am bound to say that, in all my enquiries, I have found nothing comparable to these admirable laws. Speaking as an economist I am also bound to say that I have invariably found these Scripture injunctions and the great principles of Political Economy in active and perfect harmony, a feature which I have done my utmost to trace and enforce in every page of the work referred to. The wonder is that our Church teachers remain so persistently and doggedly silent on a subject which lies so near their hand, and which is threatening society with no ordinary upheaval.

I have not yet seen the article in the "Catholic Presbyterian," but hope shortly to have that pleasure. So far as I can at present judge, my conclusions as to the ultimate system of land tenure enforced in Scripture are not in accordance with those of Mr. Reid. I have found nothing to determine that tenure as in any way, or at all events as in any important particular, identical with the Mir of Russia, the Mark of Germany, the Allmend of Switzerland, the rig and rundale system of our own ancient Caledonia, or with anything generally understood by an agrarian communal system. On the contrary, I find that the six hundred thousand heads of families, or full grown men, among whom the land of Israel was divided by lot, became each the owner of his farm or allotted portion, and that there was nothing that an Israelite defended with more jealous and watchful care than this "inheritance of his fathers." The lands of Canaan were partially divided by Moses, and the allocation was finally completed by Joshua in conjunction with the priests and the heads of the fathers of the tribes. They were divided by lot to each family, and each portion became the inheritance of each particular family. God set the people's "bounds"—the limits of their farms—"according to the number of the children of Israel." Where the boundaries were too large as in the case of Judah, they were afterwards circumscribed; where they were found to be too limited as in the case of Dan, they were subsequently enlarged.

We have then, in this Scripture history, the principle on which the lands were divided—the casting of the lot as a solemn appeal to God—God actually allocating the land—equitable portions provided for every family, enough for each, enough for all—the principle of limitation of ownership and of settled and determined boundaries—the different bounds all clearly set and determined according to the number of families for whom provision was to be made—the tiller of the soil the real and acknowledged owner of the soil. Could a clearer declaration of the will of God be made as to the division of the lands among the tillers? There was every conceivable guard thrown out against the unhealthy acquisition of more than enough—there was every conceivable security thrown around the permanent occupation and inheritance of what was set apart as sufficient.

Here, also, was a principle wholly just to unborn generations, securing them in the free and unfettered possession of their several portions when they should come upon the stage of life. For the use of the land is for each generation, and for all of each generation who, as life goes on, choose to cultivate the soil.

It is also a thorough protest, from the hand of God Himself, against all monopoly of the soil.

The lands were not divided between landlords and tenants.

They were not divided between tenants and tillers. They were divided amongst the tillers of the soil, and amongst the tillers by families, and the principle fully recognized that the tiller is the owner, and the owner the tiller.

Landlords, if they value their own safety, had better make no appeal to the Scriptural land laws. There is a far older "no rent" proclamation than Ireland, in her desperate misery, has ventured to enunciate. No landlordism, and consequently no land-rent, is the decree of the Almighty Himself. He has given a determinate expression of his will on a subject which embraces the very existence, the happiness, peace, and well-being of our race. If God's own division of His own land amongst His own children be a significant fact, there can be nothing more interesting to the investigator than to find that on the front of every one of these Scriptural laws is written, as with a pencil of light, no landlordism—no rent. Thus God would save the race from serfdom, poverty and ruin,