

## SCHOOL CRITICISM.

Criticisms are in place in two important recitations—reading and writing; and in the slate and paper exercises of all the others. They are also proper, in a general fashion, in the incidentals of the school; as the attitude, at seat and elsewhere; the language, in recitation and elsewhere; the deportment, everywhere. These six may be considered as the elements which constitute the field of school criticism.

In most instances, the recitation in reading or writing is much less profitable than it should be, simply because it is not a matter of attention. The faults to be noticed are not very numerous, and the art of reading or that of writing is in fact a simple thing. The errors in reading are usually but four or five: bad articulation; faulty rate; unnatural key; unphilosophical emphasis; ungraceful attitude;—and all these, except the first and fifth, will disappear by means of a single remedy. This remedy is the enlistment of the attention to the meaning of the selection read. It is marvelous to see how many reading-classes are promoted beyond their ability to comprehend. Where is the benefit in telling a child his emphasis is bad, when the meaning of the author is hidden from him? Emphasis has been tortured by elocutionists into a thing of art, when indeed it is as much a thing of nature as is the breath we draw. It is not a matter that requires much cultivation. Bad emphasis is a sure indication of bad attention to the point under consideration; or, what is worse, it indicates pernicious teaching. So, if the teacher would have his work prove effective, let him see that his reading-classes are correctly graded. The difficulty in this matter has been provided for already in the text-books. The Readers usually are well arranged in the published series—First, Second, Third, etc., following in proper order. But teachers, not satisfied with their happy relief from this great burden of responsibility, push Second and Third-Reader pupils forward to read in the Fourth and Fifth, and then complain that it does no good to point out the faults! The lesson assigned should be, first, such a selection of matter as the class can understand; secondly, so limited in quantity that every

point in it may receive attention. Pupils should never enter the Fourth Reader until they are able to comprehend, grammatically, the language of its lessons. The Fifth Reader is a collection of exercises full of rhetoric and logic; and the Sixth no common school has occasion to use.

Penmanship is best taught as a class exercise. In fact, it can not be *taught* in a school in any other way. The major part of the teacher's work consists in criticism; and unless he can reach more than one pupil with a valuable observation, his work is greatly attenuated. By having half the school at work on a given form at once, the teacher may glide softly and swiftly over the room, and in a moment know the prevalent error. How easily, then, may he call the attention and show the error on the board! Pupils are glad to correct their errors when they are made to see them. The errors are as few as those in reading. Attitude, shading, slant, spacing, accuracy, and smoothness of lines, etc.—these are all, and yet not one of them is mastered by a tenth of those who study penmanship! A poor writer may be a good critic, and may with the plentiful help furnished by the publishers, succeed in the teaching of this beautiful and useful art.

It is also comparatively easy to correct faulty slate and paper work. This work can all be done in full sentences, that commence with capitals and close with periods; and the letters, even of the primary pupils, may be written or printed neatly. A class bring the reading-lesson up on their slates. Is it difficult for the teacher to point out the crooks in the lines or the inequalities in the height of the letters? I have seen many slates covered with printed exercises, wherein the small *a* or *b* or *d* was turned wrong side foremost or wrong end up. These letters are invariably made of equal height at first, and no teacher should lose the excellent opportunity to awaken thought.

This department of criticism is as extensive as the scholastic curriculum. To criticise a manuscript ably is a future accomplishment, to which the slate and paper exercises of the school should look. And again, in the highest rhetorical course, the