

## POWER TO READ.

IF we mean by these words power to utter the vocal sounds corresponding to a series of printed or written symbols at sight of the symbols, our teaching of reading must be considered fairly successful. If we include also the power to give appropriate expression to narrative and descriptive passages, the same may be said. But even with these admissions there is room for the question, "Are we successful in giving the power to read?" Such an occurrence as this may give rise to the question: An intelligent man wishes to put together a simple machine from a printed description which he holds in his hands. He reads the description twice carefully, and then addresses himself to his task. But the parts will not go together. He resumes the paper, determined to follow the directions in detail, one by one. Still he finds trouble—a perversity in animate things. "Is it true that I cannot read that paper," he exclaims, "or is there something wrong with these parts?" At length they slip into place in a way as unaccountable as their former obstinacy. He reads the paper, and examines the result. "Why!" he remarks, "that is just what the paper tells me to do! what a fool I was!" How ought he to answer the question as to his ability to read?

A distinguished professor of science remarked the other day: "The great trouble with college boys is that they do not know how to read. If they could only be taught to read before they come to me, I could do a great deal more for them, but they don't know how when they come to me, and they don't know how, some of them, when they leave me; for I have not time enough to teach them.

I give a boy a book containing detailed directions how to perform an experiment, and send him into the laboratory with it to work. If he simply follows the directions, he cannot go amiss. After a little time I go around to see how he is getting on, and find that he has made a mess of it. The boy don't know how to read." Is the charge justifiable? We may go further, and ask whether these cases are exceptional? As a matter of fact, do they represent the usual result of our teaching?

Assuming that they do, it is not difficult to designate the nature of the failure. Reading consists in translating symbols appealing to the eye into corresponding sound symbols, which again ought to call up definite ideas. In the cases cited these symbols are the names of material things and of their relations. If the whole process is complete, the imagination will picture these parts and their relations, and the picture will be accurate in details, because a rightly trained mind will not rest until every symbol has its corresponding definite image. Thus working constructively, the imagination ought to build as the reader progresses, so that at the conclusion of the reading he should say, "I see it." This requires considerable imaginative power. The details are not only to be clearly grasped or imaged, but held and combined, so as to be seen in their relations. It is manifest that in these cases there is a complete break-down in the effort to do this. The imagination has not been skilfully trained. It is not strong enough. It does not respond to the verbal symbols, and the process breaks down in its last and most vital stage.

But this is not the whole of the