

Educational.

LOVE OF BOOKS AND READING.

BY A. E. WINSHIP.

A book is the home of the thought it domiciles. Thoughts met only in newspapers are merely horse-car acquaintances, besides whom we sit for a moment without knowing the name or occupation of the man; while those found in library-books are no more than incidental vacation friends, whom we enjoy for a time and never see again. We can only know thoughts and love them intelligently when we have their home within our own library to run in upon them in a friendly way, sitting in sweet converse with them for a moment or a day, as inclination dictates.

It is hardly worth while to claim acquaintance with a man whom we have met but once, however keen our enjoyment of his company; neither is it quite honest to claim acquaintance with an author, however great our appreciation, unless we have for our own the book in which he dwells. Whittier loses in a slight degree his hold on the love of his readers, because his homes change from Amesbury to Danvers and the Bear Camp River. It would certainly have heightened the pleasure of all lovers of literary men had he a permanent home, with wife and children like Longfellow, to whose home, overlooking the Brighton meadows and the winding Charles, multitudes make their pilgrimage. How much Walt Whitman, Bret Harte, and Joaquin Miller lose by leaving in the public mind the idea that they are rovers, while Curtis's hillside home, and Holland's Thousand-Island residence intensify their friendships. Every one appreciates the weakness of the musician's hold upon the community because so seldom inlanked with any home name. We listen, applaud, and admire the great artists with voice or instrument, but never think of them again until another brief concert-season arrives. And when they pass the years of best vocal powers, they live only in occasional reference. A historic incident divorced from all locality has no value; no more have thoughts and expressions that we do not know in their home, resident in some book.

We need to call a halt all along the educational line, and see if we have not gone quite far enough in cultivating a love for the hand-organ element in reading, creating a passion for type without inspiring a love for good thought elegantly expressed. We want *Helen's Babies* or *That Husband of Mine* to call at our door and give some timely jingle, and then pass on out of sight and sound. What have the schools done to remedy this?

Teachers devote fully one-fourth of all their time for the nine or ten years of a pupil's school-life to teaching reading; and what do they teach, even at the best. Of course, there are honorable exceptions, but the rule is that they simply teach the child to read aloud, a thing that nine-tenths of them will never do a dozen times in their life after leaving school. They are not taught to love reading, and least of all to love books, for the thing is impossible in a reading book, which changes its selection and style of selection every day, being a hop, skip, and jump, from ballad to oration, from dialogue to epic poem, from hymn to story.

Even our high schools and academies usually teach from English literatures that have brief selections rather than entire essays or stories, though there are a few works that remedy this evil; and when an extended poem is studied, the teacher not infrequently goes to the other extreme, teaching so minutely as to squeeze all the life and juice out of it, having it studied in a manner that they can never read in life, and in a manner that will never germinate a love for good reading or good books.

A school that turns a pupil into life without a well-established habit of reading the best things from a love of them, has failed in its mission. The public must demand that the schools teach the pupils to read profitably. Every child who goes out of the grammar school should have read intelligently under the supervision and direction of the teachers, one or more of the best works of each of the best authors. How can pupils be expected to appreciate the value of a book when the school itself does not appreciate it. Where is the grammar school with a library of standard books of a literary or avocational nature? We put tens of thousands of dollars into a school-house to enshrine a mayor's name, and possibly a few dollars into a few reference-books, but not one cent into a library.

Many a man lives on a cheap-restaurant style of coverless literature, or at best on a round of boarding-house style of library accommodations, simply because his love of good books was not cultivated in his school-days. We have no sympathy

with the unpardonable extravagance of unreasonably elaborate bindings, and even less in the purchase of a "timely" book which chances to be the rage, but the purchase of which one will regret ever after. But every child ought to be taught to love to read and re-read the works that are immortal, to love those books in a comfortable home-like binding, to love to make the sacrifice requisite to own them.

Fellow-teachers, do we love the best literature, and read it to the exclusion of all that is transient? Do we own books of permanent literary merit? Is our home-library an example to our pupils? If not, let us begin the work of library-building, the work of choice reading at once, and teach by example as well as precept.

Fellow committeemen, do we appreciate the necessity of school-room libraries of the best literature? Do we, in selecting teachers, inquire into their own reading-habits, and the character of their book purchases? Do we make a place in our curriculum for the best teaching of reading? Do we, in our school visitation, by our inquiries and advice exalt this department of education sufficiently? As critics, as parents, do we in the home, with the pen, in the Sunday-school, or in the pulpit, as circumstances may direct, enforce the necessity of driving out of existence the twelve scandalous New York city weeklies, with their three million circulation, by supplanting the love of them with a love for the best in literature?—*Journal of Education*.

THE ACME OF MISINSTRUCTION.

The public schools of Philadelphia—some of them at least—have achieved the unenviable fame of having "about the vilest plan of education that was ever devised." So at least an indignant parent says, and the proof offered is, we trust, sufficient. We cannot bring ourselves to think that any school work can be worse.

Hearing his little girl sobbing over a rule which she was trying to commit to memory, he investigated the matter and found the words to run in this wise:

"Rule for Short Division Rule dash one write the divisor at the left of the dividend, semicolon, begin at the left hand, comma, and divide the number denoted by each figure of the dividend by the divisor, comma, and write the quotient beneath, period. Paragraph."

"2. If there is a remainder after any division comma, regard it as prefixed to the next figure comma and divide as before period. If any partial dividend is less than the divisor, comma, prefix it to the next figure, comma, and write a cipher in the quotient period."

"Paragraph Proof period dash multiply the quotient by the divisor, comma, and add the remainder, comma, if any, comma, to the product, period."

The teacher's object was not to reduce this particular ten year old girl to idiocy or insanity by the quickest possible method; the aim was simply to insure the "correct" writing and pointing of the rule in the recitation room. All the children had to study rules that way; and though a Philadelphia lawyer could not easily follow the sense of a rule through such a jargon of words, it seems that Philadelphia children are compelled to; or, rather, they are compelled to memorize the jargon and the sense is disregarded. In the course of his inquiries the parent found that if a comma was left out in writing the rule, though the sense remained unchanged, the pupil suffered as much in loss of mark as though she had committed a vital blunder.

A more thoroughly foolish perversion of arithmetical instruction could not well be conceived. And the professional stupidity and formalism which could devise such an outrageous method of teaching one subject is from that achievement alone demonstrably unfit to be trusted with any branch or department of instruction.

Taking the schools as they run, good, bad, and indifferent together, it is speaking within bounds to say that two-thirds of the work done in them might be wiped out and abolished to the benefit of the children. They might then have time to learn in a reasonable way some things worth their while to know, in the learning of which in a proper way they would be educated and not stultified, as they are under the more or less mitigated Philadelphia fashion now prevalent.

The Royal Agricultural Society is about to offer prizes for the invention of a mechanical means of draining land, and one of the objects aimed at will be the introduction of an automatic excavating machine, capable of working on the land which now suffers from want of proper drainage.