

higher sphere of thought and feeling, as by a kind of enchantment. Thousands pore with delight over the pages of Homer, but Homer as he thrilled the heart when sung by the Rhapsodists of old, this is a pleasure enjoyed no more. One printing press is doubtless worth ten thousand wandering minstrels, but if some one would invent a press for the manufacture of good readers, we should have, if not another revival of learning, what is not less to be desired, an enkindling of new intellectual life in the breasts of many who have heard, indeed, the names of our noble poets, but who have never yet learned to love or enjoy them. I speak especially of the poets, for of all writing, true poetry lies perhaps nearest to the common heart, and is best adapted to furnish a counterpoise to many of the dangerous tendencies of the age. A celebrated elocutionist, when asked who taught him to read, answered, "My mother;" and, as a general rule, women read better than men, as they also speak better English. The cause of this fact, and the use to be made of it, I must leave for others to show; but I commend the whole subject to the careful study of the members of this Association.

Having spoken of improvement in systems of instruction, permit me to caution you against the *trammels* of system. There is some danger of "red-tapeism" even in the school-room. The good teacher will observe closely and handle tenderly the idiosyncrasies of children. Nature gives us only individuals and no two alike. Classification is man's work, and is always a kind of mutilation of the fact. The abstractions of the system builder are often as misleading as the fancies of the poet—both the one and the other needing to be corrected by constant reference to the actualities of life. All children may have the same faculties; but these faculties are combined in innumerable ways. As soon expect precisely the same cast of countenance as precisely the same bias of mind. An oriental shepherd distinguishes his sheep by their faces; in this country a clever farmer can distinguish a black sheep from a white one, or a sheep from a lamb. Most school-masters can do better than that as regards the body; but the colour and shape of the immortal part often escapes them. "Best men," says Shakespeare, "are moulded out of faults." The faults of the child are often a clue to his capacities, and the germs of what might be his virtues. But how much skill is required to make the transformation! It is impossible by education to run children like bullets all in one mould, and it would be no addition to the charm of life could it be done. Symmetry of culture is well enough; but nature has her own types and laws of symmetry which we must study and not force. I invite your attention to the following passages from the last work of Mrs. Stowe:—"It was the fashion of olden times to consider children only as children pure and simple; not as having any special individual nature which required special and individual adaptation, but as being simply so many little creatures to be washed, dressed, schooled, fed and whipped, according to certain general and well understood rules. The philosophy of modern society is showing to parents and educators how delicate and how varied is their task; but in the days we speak of, nobody had thought of these shadings and variations." Again: "I was reading Mr. John