

for adhering, during a few of the first months of instruction, to the old established method.

A sensible and well-educated mother is, in every respect, best qualified to instruct a child, till he can read well enough to enter on the Latin grammar. I have indeed always found those boys the best readers, on their entrance on Latin, who had been prepared by maternal care. Neither let this office be considered as degrading.* Boys thus instructed have seldom had vulgar tones,† but have read with unusual ease and elegance. But even they who have been taught to read by the more illiterate, by nurses, and by aged matrons, have soon lost them again on receiving better instruction, and on hearing better examples. And these early proficient in reading have always made a more rapid progress in their grammar, and in all classical learning, than boys who were kept back by fanciful parents, lest they should be injured by too early application, or catch the inelegant enunciation of an illiterate woman.

Let then the child be taught to read, as soon as the infant faculties begin to exhibit symptoms of improveable expansion;‡ his attention, active in the extreme, must fix on a variety of objects. Let his book be one of those objects, though by no means the only one. Let no long confinement, and no severity of reprimand or correction attend the lesson. A little will be learned at the earliest age, and with the easiest discipline. That little will infallibly lead to farther improvement; and the boy will soon, and with little pain to himself or others, learn to read; an acquisition, considered in its difficulty and in its consequences, truly great. He, on the other hand, who is retarded, by the theoretical wisdom of his friends, till he is seven or eight years old, has this burdensome task to begin, when habits of idleness have been contracted, and when he ought to be laying the foundation for classical knowledge.

It is much to be lamented, that mothers in the higher ranks of life, who are usually best qualified for the task, seldom have time or inclination to take an active part in the elementary education of their own children. The happiest consequences should flow from their immediate interposition. But it must be confessed, that the employment, though maternal tenderness and a sense of duty may render it tolerable, is by no means pleasurable; unless, indeed, under the particular circumstances of a remarkable docility in the pupil, and an amiable disposition. It may not, however, be irksome to superintend the child's improvement under the governors or servant of whatever denomination.

To facilitate the acquisition of the art of reading various contrivances have been invented, and the whole business of learning to read has been converted into a game at play. The idea is pleasing and plausible; but I never yet saw any great success attend the attempt. Loose letters cut out in ivory, are apt to be inverted, and to puzzle the child by the different appearance they make in different positions. Reading, if it was a game, was still such a game, as the child liked less than his other diversions. It was, indeed, a game at which he would never play if he could help it. I am not quite sure, that it is right to give him a notion that he has nothing to do but to play. Let him know, that he has business of a serious kind; and, by attending to it periodically, let him contract a habit of application. A temporary attention to something by no means tedious or laborious, but which at the same time he is not to consider as play, will make his diversion more agreeable. Indeed vicissitude is necessary to render diversions pleasing. They become painful business, when continued without variety. We all come into the world to perform many duties, and to undergo many difficulties; and the earlier the mind learns to bear its portion

* The Gracchi were educated, *non tam in gremio quam in sermone matris*. Not so much in the lap, as in the conversation of a mother.

† *Anse omnia ne sit vitiosus sermo nutricibus; has primum audiet puer, harum verba effingere imitando conabitur; non assuescat ergo, ne dum infans est, sermoni qui dediscendus est.*

QUINTILIAN.

‡ 'No; says Rousseau, 'keep his mind idler as long as possible. You will never make wise men, unless you can make boys idle and wild.'

This singular man tells us with an air of wisdom, that neither fables, languages, history, geography, chronology, geometry, nor any of the studies in which boys have been usually initiated in all ages by the greatest men, are proper for children under twelve or fifteen. Such doctrines do modern ages advance, for the sake of distinction! See *EMILY*.