

READING ALOUD.

The parliamentary recess affords an opportunity for the discussion of many subjects of importance to the general public, for which the daily papers would not be able to spare room while Parliament is sitting. Since the prorogation, several topics have been discussed of interest to teachers, and among these the question of the teaching of reading in schools. We last week gave extracts from letters which appeared in the *Times* on reading aloud, from which it will be seen that there exists a very general consensus of opinion that this subject is at present very badly taught in schools of every grade. It is necessary that the distinction between reading and reading aloud should be carefully borne in mind. There are many intelligent persons who are able thoroughly to enter into the meaning of an author themselves, yet who, if asked to read from that author aloud, would be utterly unable to do so in a way calculated to please or profit their audience. This fact seems not to be known to Mr. Byrne. He says, justly, that one main object of an elementary school is to turn out scholars who have a taste for reading. But when he states that a considerable degree of proficiency in reading aloud is necessary in order that a man may be able to take a pleasure in reading, he says what the experience of most of us proves to be not true. There are many who will read with delight and profit their favourite authors who are possessed of no degree of proficiency in reading aloud. The ability to read and the ability to read aloud are two different things. By the former, we mean the ability to comprehend the ideas of another through the medium of written or printed characters; by the latter, we mean, in addition to this, the ability to translate written into spoken language, so that those listening to us may also comprehend the ideas of the author read. It would be well if different terms were employed to denote these two different things. What Mr. Byrne pleads for is neither more nor less than the teaching of elocution in our elementary schools.

No one can doubt the importance of the subject. There are few intellectual pleasures greater than that of listening to a good author as interpreted by a good reader. And it has this advantage, it is a cheap pleasure; one within the means of the working classes. If the majority of the children left our schools with a taste for good reading and the power of reading well aloud, a very great deal would have been done for them. But there are one or two points in connection with the cry for improved reading that should be borne in mind. In the first place, the ability to read well aloud is due to the possession of a natural gift as much as the ability to excel as a musician or a painter. This gift may or may not be cultivated, but in its absence no amount of skilled instruction will suffice to make a really good reader. At present, an inconceivable waste of time is incurred in the attempt to make good musicians of some of the children of our middle and upper classes. Any music teacher of experience could tell of numerous cases where the necessary natural powers were absent, and yet in which years were devoted to the acquisition of a merely mechanical style of playing. So in reading, there are few children who might not, if the necessary time and attention were devoted to them, be made fair readers, but only a few comparatively who could be trained to be good readers. For these we would provide the necessary training and instruction, just as in the case of any who showed special talent in drawing. But it would be a waste of time and labour to attempt to make all, or even the majority, of the children attending elementary schools good elocutionists. The teacher can do much, but he cannot impart faculty. The delicate taste, the quick perception, the musical voice—the natural qualities, in short, which must be possessed by a good reader may be strengthened and improved

where they exist; in their absence, however, it would be vain to expect any large measure of success. Further, it is not every teacher who is himself qualified to teach elocution. It needs a good reader to train good readers. The students in our training colleges have so many more important things to attend to, as learning the exact height in feet of the Suliman Mountains and the exact length in miles of the Rio Negro, that but little time can be devoted to the acquisition of the art of reading aloud. When it is remembered that special qualifications, in both teachers and pupils, are requisite for the production of really good readers, the paucity in their number is largely accounted for.

But, for teachers, a more important matter still is the question of time. We admit fully that much more might be done in training children to read aloud than is attempted at present, if only teachers had the necessary time. We dread lest the result of the discussion of the subject that has taken place should lead to an addition to the burdens of teachers and pupils, already grievous and hardly to be borne. We may have some enthusiastic member of the School Board for London proposing a resolution that reading aloud should be more encouraged in the Board schools, and other school managers following suit. Then will follow what has happened so frequently aforesaid. It is easy to show how important is the teaching of drawing, and we have regulations laid down that so many hours per week must be devoted to drawing. Then we have some member proving what is very easy to prove, the importance of a knowledge of social economy, and straightway the Board Inspectors are directed to report upon the teaching of that subject in their districts; in other words, pressure is to be brought upon the teachers to add that subject to their already too extended curriculum. And now, we suppose, we shall, in addition to the already long list of Board Inspectors and Inspectors, have a Reading Inspector or Reading Instructor. It is time that the question should be faced how many hours per day can be profitably devoted to school work, and how that time may be distributed so as to secure the largest amount of benefit to the pupils. We would add one word to Mr. Byrne and his brother inspectors. It might be possible to do more for the children in the time even now devoted to reading, if the requirements in the earlier standards with respect to mechanical accuracy of reading and spelling were relaxed. As it is, we may well wonder that any pupils should leave our schools with a taste for reading, seeing the drudgery they have to go through in order to meet the Government requirements. One of the evil results of the system of examination which has been in vogue during the past twenty years has been the adoption by teachers of methods calculated to inspire many of their pupils with a distaste for books of any kind, so that, once free from school, they have no desire to adopt a course of profitable reading. It will be a good thing for the country when all concerned recognize the importance of making school life and work a pleasure, and adopt the means conducive to that end.—*The Schoolmaster.*

THE UNIVERSITY,—HOW AND WHAT?

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The present state of the higher education in America can be briefly comprehended in one word,—chaos. Thirty years ago there was a college course, simple and distinctive,—the education of the gentleman and the clergyman. That good old classical curriculum has nearly faded from view, though its thread of good still runs along the broad web of scholastic life and work.

The elective system has come in like a flood. When there is not full election of studies, there is election from numerous courses of study. This election descends into the preparatory schools, and we see youths of fifteen choosing their studies, as they choose their hats and shoes; albeit with somewhat greater independence of fashion. The elective system has been vastly extended through the competition of an excessive number of small denominational colleges for attracting students. Here we meet the signs of a religious chaos, which is chiefly the cause of the confusion in our higher education. Each sect is logically bound to undertake the conversion of mankind to its particular tenets. Otherwise it has no right to exist. Colleges and universities are regarded as a necessary part of the