

## Practical Department.

### SUPPLEMENTARY READING.

All who are conversant with the leading educational topics of the day are doubtless familiar with the title of the paper which I have the honor to present for your consideration : it includes all school reading outside the regular text-books, and I propose to treat the subject under two general heads, viz. : *Where should it be commenced? and What should it be?*

I am willing to concede that the present school Reader should have a place in the school-room for the purpose of aiding the child in obtaining knowledge of the orthography and use of words ; but I am unwilling that it should monopolize his time and attention throughout his entire school course. I do not object to a child's supporting himself, while learning to walk, by chair, table, or wall ; but I will not agree that he must continue this practice for months and years : and yet to my mind the practice of using a text-book in reading as a "help to read" throughout his entire school course is no more pernicious and paralyzing to his mental growth than the constant fetters of artificial aid would be to the free development of his physical organization if applied during all the term of his adolescent years. Millions of children leave school without ever having read a story of more than two pages in extent ; in fact, every child does so unless his school training has been supplemented by home instruction.

Instead of inculcating a love for the best authors in history and fiction, by the course pursued in most schools we encourage and foster the baneful habit of scrap reading in our pupils to such an extent that vast numbers of them make the journey of life without ever having read a book.

In contemplating the mental condition of one of this class, and lamenting his lost opportunities, we may fitly apply the words of the poet, and say of the result of this line of instruction :

But knowledge to his eyes her ample page,  
Rich with the spoils of time, did ne'er unroll ;  
Chill penury repressed his noble rage,  
And froze the genial current of his soul.

To counteract this evil, I would introduce, after the completion of the Second Reader, such books as "Robinson Crusoe," or the "Swiss Family Robinson," and "A Child's History of the United States" ; and by giving the same time to the reading of books of this character that is now devoted to the text-book in reading, there will be abundant opportunity for all our children, within the term of their school-life, to read the history of every nation and people that has existed since the dawn of the earliest civilization.

I have stated that the Second Reader should be the last of the regular readers used ; but this is merely a suggestion, for I would fix no arbitrary period at which to begin a general course of reading, but would recommend that it be commenced as soon as the child has a knowledge of a sufficient number of words to enable him to read intelligently the simplest stories that can be obtained. As to what he should read, let there be only the limitation that it be pure and good, and in harmony with the chords of an immortal nature. It might be from the daily papers, from magazines, from novels, from histories, from anything or from anywhere—if only the subject is pure and interesting and instructive. I would not exclude scrap reading, although I seriously object to limiting the child to it.

In teaching reading, there are three things to be kept constantly in view :

- 1st. *To teach a knowledge of words.*
- 2nd. *To teach a knowledge of facts.*
- 3rd. *To give the pupil a taste for good reading*

For the purpose of acquiring a knowledge of words, no better agency can be used than the daily and weekly newspaper, from which can be culled appropriate paragraphs giving accounts of accidents and happenings—the subjects and actors of which are all well known to the pupil. By this plan the class that but yesterday was dull and sluggish while poring over the well-worn and well-known pages of the school Reader is awakened to new life—is made conscious of a new power, and imbued with a zeal and energy that were strangers to it while circling in the treadmill of the regular school work.

When the vocabulary of the child is sufficiently enlarged, I would so extend these selections that his reading would lead to the acquisition of important knowledge. I would advance him from the reading of local notices to the perusing of general news, including telegrams from all parts of the civilized world ; and here I would introduce the study of "newspaper geography ;" the subject-matter of the article should be discussed by teacher and pupil in such a manner as to be both interesting and instructive. The city and country from which it comes should be located on the map, and the fullest elaboration given orally of the character of their people and their form of government.

But there is another object to be attained in school reading which is not reached by means of newspaper reading, viz. : continuity of thought, which is necessary to be cultivated as the most important of the mental processes of the scholar ; and its acquisition can best be secured by directing the attention to a single subject for an extended period of time, under the pressure of the most energetic concentration of the thinking faculties. If the schools overlook this point of mental culture, their work will be incomplete. This branch of training, however, may more properly be assigned to the highest primary and grammar grades, where history, biography, and carefully-selected works of fiction can be comprehended and enjoyed ; the reading of this class of books will also create a love for pure thought and a pure style.

If the schools will but do their duty in supplementary reading, the yellow-backed, pernicious literature that flaunts its signal of vice from every news-stand would soon be without a purchaser. Is there any one so gifted with imagination that he could picture contentment in the heart of a child, while reading the exploits of Dick Turpin, if the same child had revelled for years in the pages of Hume, Macaulay, Bancroft, Addison, Taylor, Abbott, Shakespeare, Scott, and Dickens ? The fault of our schools in teaching reading is, that too much time is given to manner—we teach how to emphasize, but not how to understand—we give too much time to oral expression, and not enough to mental culture.

The chief advantage which is derived from the study of the ancient languages comes from the fact that the whole time and energy of the student is given in the effort to comprehend the thought of the author, and no time is wasted in elocutionary clap-trap.

To be a good oral reader or public speaker is certainly a great accomplishment, but I do not believe either of them to be of paramount importance.

Under the present plan of teaching reading, one would suppose every child was being trained (and badly trained) for the forum or the stage, no notice being taken of the fact that not one in a thousand will ever be public readers ; and the nine hundred and ninety-nine are required to drill for years on emphasis, facial expression, and gesture, to the almost entire exclusion of the more weighty consideration, *a ready comprehension of the written thought.*

If, in after years, some one of our present pupils should be discovered seated in his own parlor, reading a scientific article from the "Popular Science Monthly," and wildly throwing his arms in