

## THE RECITATION.\*

In the olden time, the skill of the school-master was measured by his ability to keep order, even if he kept it by striking terror into the minds of his pupils; and even now many school-officers suppose that if a teacher has good order, he is a good teacher. This is not necessarily the case. Many teachers, without either learning or ability have good order. The test of the modern teacher, or rather the modern test of the teacher, is his skill in arousing and developing thought and imparting knowledge. This is chiefly done by the recitation. The recitation is the one test of the teacher. If he does not understand its purposes and cannot guide it to the accomplishment of these purposes, he fails professionally no matter whatever else he succeeds in.

The objects of the recitation are :

1. To test the preparation of the pupil.
2. To train the pupil to correct expression of thought.
3. To fix the useful information contained in the lesson.
4. To elaborate and add to the text of the lesson.

Let us glance at each of these topics, for we do not intend to enlarge on any one of them.

1. *To test the pupil's preparation.*

This is named first, because it naturally comes first in the recitation. The lesson is assigned as a task to be learned, to be mastered. The pupil should understand that he will be held responsible for the lesson, and he will be severely tested upon it *before* any help is offered by the teacher. This test will determine largely the kind of preparation the pupil will make. If the test is easy, general and scattering, so will be the preparation. But if the questions are penetrating and the test searching, the pupil will acquire the habit of accurate and thorough preparation.

2. *To cultivate in pupils correct expression.*

One would suppose, by the way some teachers talk during recitation, that the object of it is to train *teachers* in the art of correct expression. Whoever recites has the benefit of the recitation. If the teacher recites he has the benefit of it; if the pupil recites he has the benefit of it. If the teacher is intelligent and well prepared, this method is entertaining to the class, but of comparatively small profit to them. The pupils like it, for it does away with the necessity of their preparation. During the recitation the teacher's words should be few and right to the point. But in case pupils can't say anything worth mentioning about the lesson, who is to break the silence? If the class fail for want of ability, the teacher must, of course, proceed to help them to get the lesson ready for another recitation, when *they* will be expected to recite.

3. *To fix the information contained in the lesson.*

To do this it is necessary to repeat and reiterate. There is no easy path to it. The laws of association are to be remembered and applied, the understanding is to be reached, but we can't do without the drudgery of repetition. Some educators say, "Reach the understanding, and the memory will take care of itself." I don't believe it. How do we learn the multiplication table? I would advise teachers to revise *every* lesson before beginning the advance, and review the advance lesson too. By reviewing the advance lesson I mean to have the same topic discussed, or the same question answered by different pupils, or more than once by the same pupil during a recitation.

4. *To elaborate and add to the lesson.*

This is the entertaining part to the pupil, and to the teacher too if he have a point to make, or an apt illustration, or a little *new* information to impart. But this can seldom be done without pre-

vious preparation by the teacher. It can't be done at every recitation by the very best of teachers, but it might be more frequently done. A good deal of time is wasted by desultory explanations, class-room platitudes, worn-out illustrations, etc. Here is where the teacher's industry, skill, and ingenuity can be turned to good account for himself and his school.

A very common kind of recitation is that styled by Baldwin "The Drifting Method of Recitation." This is the method that takes its own course. Anybody can conduct it. It conducts itself. It begins anywhere, drifts everywhere, and ends nowhere. The teacher, like a rudderless vessel, is driven this way and that way by every passing whim or fancy suggested. It is an easy way, so easy that the teacher, though asleep, need not err therein. May their tribe decrease.

No one method is to be adhered to for young pupils. The best method for grammar schools and high schools is the topical method, interspersed with questions and answers. But there should be some written recitations too. A good method for recitation is the following :

1. Review of preceding lesson.
2. Recitation of advance lesson.
3. Addition of new matter by the teacher.
4. Recapitulation of advance lesson.

Thus far and no farther can we go in advice. As to *how* to review the preceding lesson, to recite the advance lesson, etc., that must be left to the judgment and resources of the teacher. He can do it well without some special preparation, but he must be allowed to put himself into this part of the work, and if he fails to do it successfully he must fail. The conclusion of the whole matter is, therefore, that successful teaching depends more on the man or woman than the method.

## WHAT SHOULD PUPILS KNOW?

A committee of the Board of Education of the city of Philadelphia has been visiting the schools of different western cities and determining the quality of the instruction given in them by applying a test to the fourth-year grade. The test required of each pupil is that he should write in proper form upon a page of letter paper a letter in which he should relate his experiences on the way to school, or something of a like familiar character. The relative efficiency of the instruction given in the schools of the different cities is to be determined, in the minds of this committee, by the ratio of correct papers prepared. They selected the fourth-year grade for the reason that nearly one-half of those children who enter the public schools withdraw from them at this stage or before. By the test applied they assume that it can be approximately determined how much of real preparation for actual life the schools have led these children to make.

What could be discovered by this test?

1. The pupil's ability to spell, to construct sentences, to write, and to punctuate. This is the formal side of composition.
2. The character of the pupil's vocabulary; which would indicate the degree of culture in the use of language which the home and the school had furnished.
3. The pupil's habits of observation. The paper will show whether he has formed the habit of sharp and discriminating observation, or has not yet learned to see what his eye rests upon.
4. The order or method of the pupil's thinking will be shown. Do his ideas follow each other in obedience to law, or do they come without order or method?
5. The ability of the pupil to select out of the flood of things that are present to the senses those that are important to be known.

\* By W. L. Ballantine, Mahanoy City, Pa., in *New York School Journal*.