

upon female teachers, in a great measure, to give the initiatory instruction in this branch,—a branch so variously, and, in many instances, so badly taught. The particular points to which the early teacher in this branch must give special attention, are mainly these: to aid the pupil in gaining a clear perception of the form of the letters to be made; to train the muscles of the hand and arm, that the execution of their movements shall produce a character strictly in accordance with the perception of its form; a knowledge of the elements of letters and their combination; and the correction and prevention of bad habits in the position and movement of the fingers, hand, &c.

It is to the second of these particulars that we wish to call attention in this article—the *training of the muscles*. It should not be inferred, however, that we pass over the first, and neglect to notice the other two, on account of their trivial or minor importance. Far from it. But we propose to do one thing only at a time, and we select this because we think it seldom receives the attention it deserves; and by many teachers, especially those who have themselves been badly taught, it is scarcely understood at all.

Neglect of an early and proper training of the muscles of the fingers, hand, and arm, will invariably result in giving the pupil a stiff, awkward, and undesirable handwriting, and one the execution of which is always irksome and unsatisfactory to the writer. It is equally true that such a style may be corrected and improved in proportion to the cultivation of proper habits and movements of the muscles.

The first steps, the elementary processes, which are so universally and so justly acknowledged to be the most important in all branches, are particularly and emphatically so in penmanship; and most of all in the manual part of the exercise—the education of the hand. This is true by virtue of a physical law of the muscular system. It is vastly easier to train the muscles correctly than incorrectly, because a correct movement, such a movement as is required for good penmanship, is a free, easy, and natural one, and one readily acquired, for the reason that the muscles are by nature adapted to just such a movement. Strictly speaking, it is simply developing the natural powers of the muscles; and development always gives increased strength to those powers, and additional facility for varied and difficult movements. But a rigid, cramped, and spasmodic movement is always executed with more or less difficulty, for the reason that the muscles are *not adapted* to such a movement; and if the habit is acquired, it will always be done at the expense of a very irksome effort. Another important fact to be borne in mind here is, that in youth, while the muscles are pliant, cushioned in fat, and abundantly supplied with nervous stimulus and nutritious blood, their movements are executed easily and rapidly. Not that they can, without instruction, perform difficult and artistic movements with the pencil or pen, but they can easily be trained, and their movements will soon become a matter of habit. Later in life the muscles are not so tractable. Even good habits cannot be so easily acquired, and bad ones are corrected only with great difficulty—so great, indeed, that, in a majority of cases, they are not corrected at all. You may train the young sapling and the tender vine-root; but the sturdy tree yields only when broken, and the full-grown vine holds even the giant oak in its strong embraces. Here will be seen the propriety of beginning to write at an early age, when we can avail ourselves of this superiority of youthful muscle. The vast importance of correct instruction at this time will also be seen, that there shall be in after life no necessity for unlearning or correcting, bad habits—a work, as we have said above, of so great difficulty.

In this matter of training the hand there is need of more specific instruction than teachers of writing in our common schools usually furnish. The directions frequently given are something like the following: "Keep the wrist and forearm free and move easily and freely across the paper. In all cases follow the copy *exactly*." Now how are the little chubby hands, unused as yet to act with precision, and wholly undisciplined, to execute those movements which require the trained hand of an expert, perhaps of an artist? Such a requirement is simply absurd. "Be careful," says the teacher, "be careful; make no stray marks, and don't write fast." The whole spirit of this injunction to the pupil, at the outset, is calculated to discourage him and to "stiffen the knuckles." What is a stray mark in the first attempts at writing? Any slight departure from the copy may, we suppose, be so considered, if close imitation is the first thing insisted upon and expected. But imitation is to be attained only after the pupil has by instruction and practice become capable of it. A person may laboriously imitate a pattern without knowing much of the powers of the hand, the use of the pen, or the best way of doing it; and we have sometimes known pupils who would imitate a copy when we were sure they had learned but

little or nothing of the art of writing. Again, must the pupil necessarily write slow? May not the movements of the pen be, comparatively speaking, rapid and quick? Are slow movements always enjoined in the mechanic arts, and in instrumental music?

The hand, if properly trained, is capable of executing rapid movements, even at an early stage of its education. If there is, beforehand, a clear conception of the letter, and the muscles are obedient to the will, the letter may be formed rapidly and accurately. If with an indefinite purpose, or scarcely no purpose at all, the pen is placed upon the paper, and after its movement is commenced a pause is made, to cast the eye to the copy to study its form and pattern, and then the pen is again started, blindly, as it were, or by way of experiment, of course all its movements will be slow and uncertain, especially in their results. That rapidity in writing is desirable, none will deny. Those who are called upon to compose frequently and rapidly, and with a style of handwriting slow and difficult of execution, know what a hindrance a slow-moving and aching hand is to the current of thought. Many of our happiest spontaneous thoughts must be recorded at the instant they manifest themselves, or the train of ideas they would suggest is lost forever. A mechanical power in the hand equal to this current of ideas is absolutely necessary for profitable composition.

Rapidity of execution, therefore, in penmanship is, after legibility, the most important object to be secured. That it is attainable is no more than every professional or amateur teacher of penmanship maintains, and proves, if he is a skilful and successful instructor.

The old practice of giving pupils straight lines for the first copy is, we are happy to say, nearly obsolete. To draw such a line is a feat that an artist does not felicitate himself upon until his experience has been considerable. To draw it for the sake of practice, merely, is poor policy indeed; for it needs considerable judgment to begin with, and requires but little variety of movement in the muscles. Commencing with a copy-book that must be preserved, and every character of which must be "shown to the committee and visitors," is, we think, equally objectionable. What, then, it may be asked, shall be the first exercise? We will answer that question.

Place a sheet of paper before the pupil, and with a pen execute a few plain movements, such as letters, parts of letters, or simple "flourishes." Do this in the presence of the pupil, and not at home in your own room, nor in the school-room after school is dismissed, where copies are usually "set." Let it be seen how you do it. Then require the pupil repeatedly to do the same, or something similar—not necessarily the same, however. Be very sparing of criticism, and let one object simply be before the mind, namely: to induce the pupil to use the pen freely and without restraint. If he is inclined to make other characters than the copy, or to make "flourishes" *ad libitum*, it is equally well. Not that a handwriting abounding in flourishes is desirable. It is not. But the first movements of the pen will have very little to do with the style of the handwriting yet to be formed.

This exercise is to be considered as a *muscular discipline*. Insist upon its being a frequent one, and if it is done pretty much regardless of copy, or of the lines upon the paper, make no objection, provided there is discernible an improvement in the free swing of the muscles, and the off-hand movement of the pen. Young pupils often have a fancy for a particular letter, or letters, as written by a seatmate, or some friend, and are quite inclined to imitate them. Let it be done, and done freely. If the whole exercise is treated as one mere play to give free play and development to the muscles, and is not cramped by arbitrary rules, there will soon be noticed an improvement, and one of which the pupil himself will be fully aware—a matter of no small moment, as consciousness of success stimulates to greater and more careful effort. Teachers cannot have failed to observe that this same principle and result of free and easy practice is almost daily exemplified in particular cases under their notice. In most schools there are pupils, more or less, who are much employed with the pen, or pencil, in writing, drawing, and scribbling. It is done at the expense of prodigious quantities of paper, and is frequently accompanied with an amount of scratching and noise that is quite annoying. Moreover, the practice is incessant, unless checked or prevented. But the result of the whole matter is, such pupils almost invariably acquire an easy, elegant, and uniform hand-writing.

Let this practice of the muscles be continued until there has been acquired a facility of movement in the hand, and a command over it, that shall make the pupil fully conscious of considerable executive power with his pen. It may require many days, perhaps some weeks; but in all cases the skill acquired will amply repay the effort and time required for its attainment. This having been accomplished, the pupil is now prepared to give attention to the details of the elements of letters, and also their particular form,