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**READING IN OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS.**

THE supporters of our Common Schools, on introducing their friends as visitors, to these institutions find many things in their educational work to commend, of which they may be justly proud. As a rule, our pupils do exceedingly well in Arithmetic, Algebra and Geometry, and are, on the whole, well grounded in the principles of English Grammar, and in various other branches of study which make up the ordinary round of public school work.

There is however one branch of which we have little room for boasting, but rather, we fear, many for regret, if not for mortification. A good reader, or one accustomed to good reading, can enter but few of our schools where, honestly, he can bestow the meed of praise, or utter for the teacher's and pupil's encouragement the language of commendation for good reading. The following questions are often heard, "Why is the standard of reading so low in the public schools? Why do our schools produce but few good readers? Why is more attention not given to this most important branch of education? Why is not good reading regarded as an indispensable accomplishment?" Such inquiries are undoubtedly suggested because of the low measure of attainment reached in our schools, and are important questions commending themselves to the attention of all, who have in any way the management of schools, or the training of youth. It is often urged as a reason for this that we have such imperfect models in the public readers to whom our children constantly listen; that as a rule clergymen, lawyers and other public speakers are but indifferent readers. We do not however, admit this last as a truth in the measure claimed for it, while there may be good ground for the assertion to a certain extent. A public speaker very often utters his own thought extemporaneously, with vigor and force, and even eloquence, and holds for a time his audience in fixed attention, but when he comes to read a passage from some book, fails entirely to bring out, as he should, the thought and spirit of the writer, and hence fails to secure, even for a short time the minds of the listeners. Many clergymen read their sermons very well, when they are but poor readers of the scriptures. This imperfect reading by public men, no doubt, has its influence, but often admitting all that may be justly said of public readers, it is certainly not, by any means, the real cause of that imperfect reading in our schools, public and private, of which so many complaints are made.

There are strong reasons for fearing that the importance and value of good reading is far from being generally appreciated, and that a high estimate is the exception to the rule. We claim that this branch of our school work should rank among the very first, and that there are strong and obvious grounds on which to rest this claim. Reading is one of the first mental exercises that arrests and holds the attention of a child, and it will be noticed, that just as it is good or inferior will be the pleasure to the youthful listener. A little story well read, or a verse properly recited, never fails to secure the attention of children, and rarely ever, do even young children weary. When the reading is of the necessary style, "read a little more" is often the artless response to the question "are you fatigued." And so also with the aged and the infirm, so that we may regard reading as

alike the delight of the young and the solace of the aged, indeed through life, there are few periods when the mind does not realize profit and comfort from reading. It is said by a few of those who read in Prisons and Hospitals that some refuse all efforts to benefit, or comfort them in this way, and seem to derive no benefit from the reading of kind friends, who offer their service. We have known instances of failure to interest, when evidently it was the manner that failed, not the matter. One person enters a hospital and opens a book at the couch of an invalid, and soon finds a painful and discouraging absence of all interest, and in discouragement retires; another enters, perhaps reading the same passages, and finds all attention, and is delighted to see in every feature of the sick man's face expression of pleasure, and when good-bye is said, "O come again" is the response. The difference is simply in the manner or style of reading, one is a good reader the other is not. Few, very few, fail to derive both pleasure and profit from reading, especially when the passage is selected from those treasures of varied and fascinating literature, so abundant in our glorious English Language.

The matter of our school books is selected from the best literature of our language, and affords our instructors ample scope and material for successful work in teaching to read. But the main difficulty is, so few of our Teachers themselves are good readers, or suitable models for their pupils. They have given time and labor to other branches, but thinking themselves good readers, pass carelessly over this part of their work, supposing that they could instruct boys in branches which evidently they had never themselves learned. We want to urge a thoughtful consideration of this matter on all our teachers, and request from them a careful study of the best methods of teaching this most important branch of knowledge, that they may send from their schools good readers as well as good arithmeticians, good spellers, or good writers.

It is but reasonable, to expect, when visiting our schools to bear passages read, so as to convey, to some extent at least, the assurance that it is understood by the pupil, and we might also expect to see something like the spirit of the author thrown into the passage, so that what otherwise might be incomprehensible may become plain. Nor should we on such occasions expect to hear advanced pupils mispronounce simple words, and read regardless of all pauses, and skip over passages from our most illustrious writers, as a school boy would read the notice of an auction sale or an advertisement for selling tea and sugar.

One of the first things to be attended to, by a teacher who aims at success in this work, is to ascertain, as far as possible, the causes which operate to make good readers, and to know why it is that good reading is such a rare attainment. In the first place evidently the instructor should secure from the pupil an interest in the passage to be studied for reading, that having his mind imbued with its spirit, he may the more easily and pleasantly read with the proper accents and modulations of voice. In many instances rapid and incorrect reading is the result of careless habits, the pupil having never been required to practice the rules he had been taught. A good and distinct pronunciation should be insisted upon, as of the first value in reading; this should be an invariable rule from the primary class