

Special Articles,

THE FOUR SCHOOL ARTS.

The four arts may be stated thus: 1. The art of getting accurate and available knowledge from things about us,—we may say more briefly, the art of using our own senses. 2. The art of expressing clearly and systematically what is learned. 3. The art of getting out of books what is in them. 4. The art of using numbers skillfully. These arts are of such prime necessity to every civilized being that the community is justified in insisting that every child shall acquire them; and the elementary schools are created primarily to impart them.

It is a true instinct which, from the earliest times, has made the third the most esteemed and indispensable. Once mastered, the child may be his own instructor. He is given the key to the storehouse of human knowledge, which contains treasures he is utterly impotent to acquire for himself by any other means. We react at present against book-learning, because we have been content to teach how to read, instead of attempting the larger and more fruitful art of getting out of books what is in them. It is the height of educational folly to turn away from books because our own unskilled workmen have misused them.

The first of these arts, which seems the most fundamental, is the one that has come latest into the schools, and as yet we are all clumsy workmen at it. It came in late because nature unaided does so much first. Her processes, are, however, hap-hazard and disconnected. How to look at a thing analytically and with tolerable completeness, so that the consciousness shall play about it long enough for it to become deeply interesting and suggestive is an art capable of being taught by a skilful workman. It is learned like other arts, by doing it under intelligent guidance. Notwithstanding the wretched machine work and formalism which has reigned in the attempt to introduce it, some real progress has been made. When the real teacher comes he makes it an inspiration.

The second art is the natural and necessary adjunct of the first. The use of the senses gives knowledge when their results are made definite and suggestive by language. When shall we learn that language is a means and not an end, and that proper power with it is acquired by using it for its proper end—to body forth a mental product? What dreary drills our little ones suffer in the effort to beat in upon them prematurely grammatical distinctions, and grammatical rules! A child does not want rules. They are a lingo to him—mere farrago which he says over to be counted out. He gets little more profit out of artificial sentences, with whose parts he plays fox and geese to oblige the teacher. He learns to talk most when he talks his own thought. He tells what he has a real interest in, and is guided patiently to put his thought into a complete and proper sentence; then in time into a little paragraph which he builds under apt suggestions; and finally into fairly complete description. Such work is real, vital. It forms the power of speech in him, the power of observation, the power of systematic thought. It is the sort of preparation which he needs for life—to write a letter, or conduct a business, or make a man of science or of letters. Knotty drills on *this* and *that*, *these* and *those*, are pedagogical pop-gun fights, chiefly valuable to entertain holders.

Drill in expression, however, is broader than this. It becomes complete, accurate, lasting when written. "Writing maketh an exact man." It also makes a permanent effect upon a young pupil.

What a clumsy, all-in-a-heap effort to develop constructiveness the ordinary school composition is! A dreary task

"Of dropping buckets into empty wells,
And growing old with drawing nothing up."

Step by step this constructiveness is developed as ideas and words to express them are gained, if the guide knows how to shape the efforts of the young learner so that he can first tell something he has a real interest in and then put it down upon paper. Drawing is another form of expression. If it is little used, even by those who are trained in it, this is because, again, the training is far away from their own mental life. Somehow we must allow the child—we must guide him rather—to use it early and often as an instrument for expressing himself, if we would give it a real place among the arts he knows and uses.—*Intelligence.*

LITERARY CULTURE AMONG TEACHERS.

Some time ago the *Index* savagely arraigned the great mass of teachers as being deficient in proper knowledge and love of literature, alleging that the cultured teacher was the exception among the masses. At the time we commented briefly upon the article, and not with disapproval. We wish that all of our teachers had a higher ambition than many of them seem to have. We could wish for a greater thirst for knowledge. We could desire a broader information, a more thorough literary culture. We do not wish to be misunderstood in this matter. In no profession are there to be found so many men and women of superior culture, profound knowledge and eminent intellectual attainments as in this teachers' profession of ours. The most eminent men in all departments of learning are, or have been, teachers. It is a profession in which brains, above all else, are required. It is a profession of earnest, hard working members, and we glory in belonging to it. It is our boast and our honor. Let no one accuse us of casting slings at the calling. It is because we love it, because we would see it become more dignified, because we would have its power and influence more widely acknowledged, that we are free to criticise whenever we may deem advisable. Now it is a fact that many—we do not say all, far from it,—of the teachers in our graded schools, and in our country and village schools particularly, are woefully lacking in desire to obtain a more complete equipment for their work in the way of study. There is a vast mine of wealth in this grand literature of ours that to them is unknown, not because the delving is difficult, but because of sheer lack of interest. It often happens that many teachers are persons of limited acquirements, whose education has been the price of hard toil and perhaps privation, and who have made themselves what they are. Such teachers are apt to be students, and to them we have nothing to say. Give them time and it will be no fault of theirs if they do not widen their horizon. Then there are those who have had every educational advantage, who have had the instruction of the best teachers in the best colleges. To most of these we need say nothing. But there is a class, and it is the large class, too, among our teachers, who utterly neglect any form of self-improvement. What little reading they do is not of a high order, confined perhaps to the latest novel or magazine, no solid brain food, nothing to make mental fibre. These are the teachers, too, who most need every opportunity to grow mentally. The thought of study, of self improvement rarely troubles them. Their aspirations are not lofty. They do not try to advance, consequently they continually retrograde and wonder why it is that they have so little success, so small salaries; why it is that other teachers are preferred to them. It is enough that they plod through the same weary, dreary routine of school room work year in and year out. Some of them wear out, some of them drop