

sive delivery. It is difficult to find in our Canadian school books an appropriate selection. We have no authorized reading book especially adapted for the aims of a higher elocution. Such a book must contain selections from the works of fiction and poetry, and above all, from the great dramatic creations of our literature. These, and especially the last, demand analytical power and conception for true delivery, and give exercise to the mental faculties of the student of the highest order and importance. The study of poetry for reading calls into play the imaginative faculties, and cultivates that spirit of poetry which is implanted in every human being, but which is crushed out, as much by our unimaginative system of education as by the selfishness and hardships of real life. The reading of dramatic poetry has a special value in the incessant changes of character, thought, and passion, which mark its creations and its dialogues. The true reader of dramatic poetry transfers himself into another life and other beings; enters out their deepest sympathies, and makes them his own; and in this sympathy with humanity, strengthens the best emotions of his own nature and develops all the higher faculties of his mind. Such a book should also contain the best selection that the eloquence of the pulpit or the platform can provide—as preparations for the public life on which many of our pupils may afterwards enter. The true study of passages for reading demands a knowledge of the whole subject under consideration. There must not only be the subjects of the thought and of the construction of the sentence; the student must not only understand the “dictionary meaning” of every word; but he must have a full conception of the special thought or passion he is going to read, in relation with all the other thoughts and passions, related to it in the entire composition; and whether it be oratory or poetry, or the drama—all the circumstance related to that special production

must be clear and familiar to his mind, to make his reading truthful and powerful.

Let us take then as an illustration of all these conditions, “Hamlet’s soliloquy on Death,” 5th Reader, page 488. Have many of my readers been made familiar in their school education with the history and character of this great tragedy? For it is impossible to read this brief extract with truthfulness, without that knowledge. Hamlet, a prince of noble and honorable character, animated by the highest sentiment of filial piety, with a pure and chaste mind, has seen his royal father suddenly and unaccountably cut off, with evidences pressing on his judgment that his uncle, the reigning king, is his father’s murderer, and yet two months after that father’s death, his mother marries the suspected uncle and lives, in his pure conception, an adulterous queen, wedded to the murderer of her husband and his father. His whole moral sense is perplexed and overwhelmed, and he lives only for vengeance and justice. But he is a type of the men of thought as contrasted with the men of action. “The craven scruples on thinking too precisely on the event.” He has no clear evidences of his uncle’s guilt, although his father’s spirit has visited him and revealed the murder. In every form he finds excuses for his inertness, and yet urged by filial obligation, and horror for the crime, and the shame, which have blasted his life, he has no peace. Thus he contemplates suicide—and in this spirit he utters the soliloquy, “To be—or not to be;—that—is the question.” In reading the word “be,” the voice takes the rising, while “not” receives the falling inflection. The expressions are antithetical, and all antithetical forms must have contrary inflections. But besides the just inflection—the deep import of the momentous question demands a solemn, meditative, unimpassioned, but not unfervent tone of voice, trembling with feeling as “be”