

2. THE DECORATION OF SCHOOL-ROOMS.

Hitherto, as far as I know, it has either been so difficult to give all the education we wanted to our lands, that we have been obliged to do it, if at all, with cheap furniture in bare walls; or else we have considered that cheap furniture and bare walls are a proper part of the means of education; and supposed that boys learned best when they sat on hard forms, and had nothing but blank plaster about and above them whereupon to employ their spare attention; also, that it was as well they should be accustomed to rough and ugly conditions of things, partly by way of preparing them for the hardships of life, and partly that there might be the least possible damage done to the floors and forms, in the event of their becoming, during the master's absence, the fields or instruments of battle. All this is so far well and necessary, as it relates to the training of country lads, and the first training of boys in general. But there certainly comes a period in the life of a well-educated youth, in which one of the principal elements of his education is, or ought to be, to give him refinement of habits; and not only to teach him the strong exercises of which his frame is capable, but also to increase his bodily sensibility and refinement, and show him such small matters as the way of handling things properly, and treating them considerately. Not only so, but I believe the notion of fixing the attention by keeping the room empty, is a wholly mistaken one: I think it is just in the emptiest room that the mind wanders most; for it gets restless like a bird for want of a perch, and casts about for any possible means for getting out and away. And even if it be fixed, by an effort, on the business in hand, that business becomes itself repulsive, more than it need be, by the vileness of its associations; and many a study appears dull or painful to a boy, when it is pursued on a blotted deal desk, under a wall with nothing on it but scratches and pegs, which would have been pursued pleasantly enough in a curtained corner of his father's library, or at a latticed window of his cottage. Nay, my own belief is, that the best study of all is the most beautiful; and that a quiet glade of a forrest, or the nook of a lake-shore, are worth all the schoolrooms in Christendom, when once you are past the multiplication-table; but be that as it may, there is no question at all but that a time ought to come in the life of a well-trained youth, when he can sit at a writing-table without wanting to throw the inkstand at his neighbor; and when also, he will feel more capable of certain efforts of mind with beautiful and refined forms about him than with ugly ones. When that time comes, he ought to be advanced into the decorated schools; and this advance ought to be one of the important and honorable epochs of his life.

I have no time, however, to insist on the mere serviceableness to our youth of refined architectural decorations, as such; for I want you to consider the probable influence of the particular kind of decoration, which I wish you to get for them—namely, historical painting. You know we have hitherto been in the habit of conveying all our historical knowledge, such as it is, by the ear only, never by the eye; all our notions of things being ostensibly derived from verbal description, not from sight. Now, I have no doubt that as we grow gradually wiser—and we are doing so every day—we shall discover at last that the eye is a nobler organ than the ear; and that through the eye we must, in reality, obtain, or put into form, nearly all the useful information we have about this world. Even as the matter stands, you will find that the knowledge which a boy is supposed to receive from verbal description is only available to him so far as in any underhand way he gets a sight of the thing you are talking about. I remember well that, for many years of my life, the only notion I had of the look of a Greek knight, was complicated between recollection of a small engraving in my pocket Pope's Homer and a reverent study of the Horse-Guards. And though I believe that most boys collect their ideas from more varied sources, and arrange them more carefully than I did, still, whatever sources they seek must always be ocular: if they are clever boys, they will go and look at the Greek vases and sculptures in the British Museum, and at the weapons in our armories—they will see what real armor is like in lustre, and what Greek armor was like in form, and so put a fairly true image together, but still not, in ordinary cases, a very living or interesting one. Now, the use of your decorative painting would be, in myriads of ways, to animate their history for them, and to put the living aspect of past things before their eyes as faithfully as intelligent invention can; so that the master shall have nothing to do but once to point to the school-room walls, and forever afterward the meaning of any word would be fixed in the boy's mind in the best possible way. Is it a question of classical dress—what a tunic was like, or a chlamys, or a peplus? At this day, you have to point to some vile wood-cut, in the middle of a dictionary page, representing the thing hung upon a stick; but then, you would point to a hundred, figures, wearing the actual dress, in its fiery colors, in all actions of various stateliness or strength; you would understand at once how it fell around the people's limbs as they stood, how it

drifted from their shoulders as they went, how it veiled their faces as they wept, how it covered their heads in the day of battle. Now, if you want to see what a weapon is like, you refer, in like manner, to a numbered page, in which there are spearheads in rows, and swordhilts in symmetrical groups; and gradually the boy gets a dim mathematical notion how one cimeter is hooked to the right and another to the left, and one javelin has a knob to it, and another none: while one glance at your good picture would show him,—and the first rainy afternoon in the school-room would forever fix in his mind,—the look of the sword and spear as they fell or flew; and how they pierced, or bent, or shattered—how men wielded them, and how men died by them. But far more than this, it is a question not of clothes or weapons, but of men; how can we sufficiently estimate the effect on the mind of a noble youth, at the time when the world opens to him, of having faithful and touching representations put before him of the acts and presences of great men—how many a resolution, which would alter and exalt the whole course of his after-life, might be formed, when in some dreary twilight, he met, through his own tears, the fixed eyes of those shadows of the great dead, unescapable and calm, piercing to his soul; or fancied that their lips moved in dread reproof or soundless exhortation. And, if for but one out of many this were true—if yet, in a few, you could be sure that such influences had indeed changed their thoughts and destinies, and turned the eager and reckless youth, who would have cast away his energies on the race-horse or the gaming-table, to that noble life-race, that holy life-hazard which should win all glory to himself and all good to his country—would not that, to some purpose, be "political economy of art?"

3. BEAUTIFUL SCHOOL ROOMS IN CLEVELAND.

One very pleasing feature of the Cleveland Schools is the fact that there is not a school-room in the city that is not adorned with a greater or less number of engravings. These are purchased by voluntary contributions from the pupils, or from the proceeds of exhibitions given by them. In addition to this, I found in all the school-rooms I visited, ornamental and flowering plants, some of these rooms being very parterres of beauty. The value of the influence on the culture and tastes of the pupils thus brought into daily contact with the beautiful in nature and art (to say nothing of the effect upon the teachers themselves) can scarcely be over-estimated.

II. Papers on Practical Education.

1. PROMPTNESS IN SCHOOL.

A very large share of the troubles and quarrels connected with country schools grows out of the scholars being upon the school-premises in the absence of the teacher.

On opening school for a term, I fix in my own mind the earliest hour at which I believe I can regularly be upon the premises, and advise that none be there before this time. In the district in which I have taught ten winters, some of the pupils must travel over three miles to reach the school-house. There is not a clock in every family. An ordinary school-house bell would be a nuisance, as no person resides within less than half a mile of the school-house. Under these circumstances, even with full intention on the part of parents and pupils to do as I wish to have them, they vary nearly an hour in the time of arriving at the school-house. My time for being there is never less than one hour before 'school time'. The janitor has the house in order and warm at 7.45, and as soon as scholars arrive on the premises they enter the school-house and remain there. All that is required is that they do nothing which will disturb those who wish to study. They, without any of my regulating, fall into squads of two to five and work upon their lessons. There is a buzzing in the room, as though it were full of bees, but no loud noise. There are plenty of matters for me to attend to during this time. Some times the whole hour is devoted to enlightening different individual scholars who have failed to thoroughly comprehend something in the lessons which their respective classes have gone through. Commonly the little folks are all there at 8.30, and I begin to hear their lessons, thus gaining time for general exercises during the regular school-hours, and giving them more time for recess during the day. At 8.55 we take a recess of three minutes, immediately after which the roll is called. Any one who comes in after this remains after school is dismissed in the afternoon to have his attendance entered upon the roll.

With an average attendance of 35 pupils, I believe we have not ten cases of tardiness during the the last six months of school. I eat my dinner in the school-room, encouraging social intercourse, correct deportment and correct expression among the pupils.