

How to Influence the General Reading in Public Schools.

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At the inception of the public school system the trustees in this city made laudable efforts to improve the style of reading among our pupils. The personal labors of Prof. Munro here are not yet forgotten, and his Manual leaves little to be desired in reference to this subject. Midway in the interval of time that has since elapsed, Dr. Rand dealt with this department of education more than once in the Educational Circulars—the loss of which is much to be regretted by teachers. And, from the beginning, the minds of old educational conservatives were startled by the novel modes of the *look and say* method in the primary departments of the new schools. Altogether we may say, that more attention has been paid to this study than to any other, and rightly so I think, for it is in various ways the most important of all studies. If the advocates of the narrowest view of education insist on “the three Rs” to the exclusion of other studies for the mass of the people, there is a further step possible, namely, to insist on this one R; for if you only enable the masses to read, the obvious interests of everyday life would compel them to acquire the other two. The days, however, have long gone by for any such narrowing to be dreamt of.

If I do not enter on the initiatory departments of the study it is because I feel, that remarks to you upon it from one who has never come much into contact with this part of the work, would be out of place. I will, therefore, only notice at this stage of the subject, that some of the modern innovations of method are not quite so new as they seem; a remark that will apply even to some of the devices of the kindergarten. Erasmus, the great humorist and scholar of the Renaissance, says that “the ancients moulded toothsome dainties into the forms of the letters, and thus as it were made children swallow the alphabet.” And we rather unexpectedly find the stern Jerome writing thus: “Put into the hands of Paula (a little girl) letters in wood or in ivory, and teach her their names. She will thus learn while playing.” About 1650 the Jansenist teachers of Port Royal laid down the maxim that “it is best to teach children the letters only by the names of their real powers, to name them by their natural sounds,” which has ever since been called the Port Royal method. A generation later the gentle Fenelon (whose delightful prose epic of *Telemachus* would be enough in itself to tempt one to learn French, if only to enjoy it in the original) says: “I have seen certain children who have learned to read while playing,” and then urges teachers to mingle instruction with play. “Let wisdom,” he elsewhere says, “appear to them only at intervals, and then with a laughing face.” So also his contemporary Locke recommends instructive plays for reading and the first exercises of children. “They may be taught to read,” he adds, “without perceiving it to be anything but sport, and play themselves into that which others are whipped for.” So Rollin, the historian, also urges that reading and spelling be taught by the use of games with pasteboard cards arranged in pigeon holes, and pleaded that school books should be illustrated, herein anticipating some of the ideas of Pestalozzi.

Turning from this retrospective glance at some of the premonitions of our primary system we come to the methods pursued in the intermediate stages. Munro's Manual asso-

ciates with his instructions in reading, exercises for improving the vocal organs, and what may be called school hygiene. These exercises prepare for the production of a firm, good tone. In this connection I may add that a very good time for the reading lesson is after recess—as the lungs are then in a good state for this exercise. This is especially suitable in a school where the physical drill which Munro advocates is not carried out. The first point is to insist on a clear, distinct articulation; giving the pupils in this your own example. Younger classes profit more by imitation—precepts and principles may come in later. Fortunately for the Canadian teacher, the social condition of the great mass of our people is that of the happy medium prayed for by Agar; so that he has to combat comparatively few of the grosser errors in pronunciation of the very lowest class, nor yet those of fashion or affectation among the higher. The most inveterate faults I have found, are a disposition to clip the words too short, to neglect certain consonant endings, to avoid the use of *ave* and *ah* sounds, and to lose sight of the fact that there are two distinct forms of the aspirated dental, and consequently mispronounce such words as *thither*, *booth*, *blithe*. There is a collection of the most commonly mispronounced words in the Teachers' Edition of the Speller. Every teacher, however, might make a collection of his own on a fly leaf of his reader; and thus be kept in mind of these frequent offenders. He will find that they mostly admit of classification into Anglicisms, Scotticisms, Hibernicisms, and Americanisms. They are not numerous, but occur very often, and should always be dealt with when they do.

The great secret of pronunciation is in finishing off the syllables distinctly; and here constant and patient drill, both individually and collectively, is necessary. In this drill other things also are to be aimed at—as a pleasant tone, a comfortable pitch of voice, a flexibility in expressing the different emotions, as the class rises in intelligence and is able to appreciate and understand the phrasing of the sentence—that is, its divisions into small groups of words of connected meaning, and distinct in some measure from other groups.

As we advance into the higher grades, we can go further. In poetry, the scholars are to be cautioned that the ends of the lines are not always the places for pausing, also that, both in prose and poetry, there are stops without pauses, and on the other hand pauses without stops. Thus we put a comma both before and after a parenthetical connective and a vocative, but we pause only after it in reading. For example, “I cautioned him, however, that he must not open the box,” and again in the Benedictus: “And thou, child, shall be called the prophet of the highest.” To be always correct as to pause, modulation, and emphasis is no small matter; and for this as for other reasons no one can afford to neglect the preparation of his reading lesson. Bell makes emphasis depend on the three principles of novelty, contrast, and suggestion. Emphasize, therefore, the words that bring in a new idea, and any put in contrast with each other, which in a few cases affects not only the emphasis but also the natural accent, as “He must increase, but I must decrease.” Qualifying words, of course, are more emphatic than the words qualified. Demonstratives are naturally emphatic by way of contrast. In old style the personal pronouns were often so used, as is often seen in the Bible and the English Prayer Book. Indeed the third personal pronoun is called by some grammarians a demonstrative, as in Latin. Of course when the personal pronouns are so used, they are emphatic. A personal pronoun qualified by a relative