

PRIMARY EDUCATION.

Before primary education attracted the interest and attention of teachers and of the department in charge of public education the little ones in too many cases received but scant justice. Sometimes they enjoyed a share of the teacher's time, but more frequently they were handed over to the older pupils. Pressure of work in the other classes and, perhaps, want of sympathy, precluded the teacher from devoting to them that care and consideration which was their due. Special lessons on the phenomena by which they were surrounded were not dreamed of, far less the pleasant means by which the tedium and irksomeness of school-time are mitigated to the youngest pupils in our modern schools. Monotonous reading and spelling constituted to them the business of the day. In the whole procedure there was nothing to awaken the interest, stimulate the power of observation, or brighten the heart—nothing but the dull mechanical effort to overcome the difficulties of pronunciation and master the perplexing forms of words.

Much has been done in recent years to secure adequate provision for primary instruction. In country districts, where it is necessary, the primary department has its own teacher, and in towns elaborate arrangements are made to meet the demands of a larger population. Children are assembled in infant schools, and are thus, when the mind is very impressionable, brought under the influence of men or women qualified to impart such instruction as is best adapted to their years. And here, at this early age, the work of education begins, and the pupil takes the first step in that course which is intended to prepare him for the duties of life.

The age at which children enter the infant department and are passed on through the other primary grades necessitates work of the simplest kind. We must not, however, be regarded as suggesting the inference that on this account the duties of the infant teacher are light and easily performed. Far from it. Every good teacher cannot successfully overcome the difficulties of such a situation. Special appliances are necessary, and rare gifts in the teacher to enable her to employ them to the best advantage. She must be possessed of tact and judgment to guide her unerringly in the treatment of the children, and of an affectionate disposition to win their confidence and secure their love. She must have a good constitution, be cheerful, patient and active in body and mind, ready of resource and orderly in habits. It is, moreover, indispensable that she be a musician, that she be of good manners, speak with accuracy and distinct-

ness, and be endowed with the faculty of presenting her lessons with vigor and picturesqueness. Where the teacher to whom is entrusted the initiation of the pupils in the earliest rudiments of education is so gifted the school-room becomes a place to which the children repair with pleasure, where the seeds of right principle are sown and the foundation of good habits laid, and the further advancement of the pupils from grade to grade is simplified and rendered satisfactory.

When a teacher exhibits a special talent for primary work she ought to be encouraged to devote herself to it. The habit of promoting teachers to a higher department simply because they have acquitted themselves well in the lower is not always accompanied by good results. The qualities and accomplishments requisite in a primary teacher are not necessarily those which ought to distinguish the teacher in the higher grades. It not unfrequently happens that a good primary teacher is lost by such promotion and her position assumed by one who would be a successful teacher of an advanced class. We would therefore desire to see the teacher of the primary department estimated by the quality of the work she performs, and paid a salary proportionate to its excellence and her period of service. Were this done she would be more willing to remain in that position and unreservedly devote her energies to the perfecting of her methods, while her pupils would reap the benefits to be derived from her deeper acquaintance with the nature of children, greater expertness in their management, and a more discriminating knowledge of their capacity.

Much of the early disinclination to attend school, which used to be observed in children, was doubtless attributed to the bald and uninteresting exercises which occupied their time. Now, happily, this no longer exists or does so only where reasonable efforts are not put forth to devise means by which pleasure may be communicated as well as instruction. Teachers have at last acknowledged by the methods which they have adopted that the age of the children necessitates amusement rather than serious work. They must, undoubtedly, be taught to read and spell and use the slate-pencil, but the lessons ought to be short, and varied by marching, singing, or other exercises in which they take delight. By guarding against the mistake of prolonging any part of the programme until it becomes wearisome, the children continue bright, receptive and happy throughout, and are soon led to regard the school-room with some degree of affection, and the recurrence of school-time with satisfaction if not with pleasure. And this is no trivial gain. It will smooth the way for the child in