

POETICAL LITERATURE IN ELEMENTARY EDUCATION.

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Before reading the paper that I have prepared, I desire to express my appreciation of the honor done me by your executive in inviting me to read a paper before this institute.

I was asked to read a paper or give a talk on literature. I have decided to read a paper on "Poetical Literature in Elementary Education." It has been my privilege and pleasure during the last ten years to endeavor to interest the student teachers of the Normal School in poetry; to enable them to enjoy, appreciate and interpret the poetry of the school readers, to the end that they in their schools might enable the boys and girls of New Brunswick to find pleasure and profit in the musical sounds of verse; and that they might instill in their pupils a desire to become more familiar with the masterpieces, of which so many poems in the school readers are but short selections.

It is because I have been engaged in this work that you have invited me to come down to Charlotte County to talk to you for a few minutes. What do you wish me to say to you? What should I say to you? Well, I have decided to say to you a few of the things that I try to do in the Normal School, and which I believe are the things we should succeed in doing if the desired results are to be secured.

The literature lesson to be appreciated by the pupil must be enjoyed by him. If the teacher is to succeed in making the pupils enjoy the lesson she must enjoy it herself. She may, however, not find as much pleasure in teaching the poem as the author does in writing it. "Tam O'Shanter" was written in a day. Burns had spent the day at the Nithside. In the afternoon his wife joined him with the children. He was crooning to himself; so she remained at a distance lest she might disturb him. Soon she was attracted by his wild gesticulations. She found him reciting aloud, while the tears rolled down his cheeks, these lines:

"Now Tam, O Tam, had thae been quaens,

A' plump and strapping in their teens."

"I wish you could have seen him," she says, "he was in such ecstasy."

One day this summer, as I was walking along a street, I met a college class mate whom I had not seen for several years. "You are still teaching," he said. "Yes," I replied. "And," he continued, "they tell me you like teaching." His tone of voice more than his words showed that he considered what he had heard to be almost incredible, that any one could like teaching.

You remember what Carlyle says in his Essay on Burns, "The only true happiness of a man is clear,

decided activity in the sphere for which by nature and circumstances he has been fitted and appointed."

The teacher who really teaches Poetical Literature enjoys the literature period and finds true happiness in her daily task. But, you ask, how is the teacher to succeed in getting her pupils to enjoy poetry even though she does enjoy it herself, when children as a rule dislike poetry? My answer to that is that it is the exception and not the rule that children dislike poetry. Children in the lower grades, at least, enjoy poetry, yes they love it. Why? The rhymes of the sounds at the ends of the lines are pleasing to their ears and the poems are written about things with which they are familiar and which they love. Hence they are easily understood and enjoyed.

During the first week of the present school term, a child full of life and happiness, came running up to her father as he returned home after his day's work, desiring that he should hear her read what she had learned at school that day. When she had finished reading the first poem in the second primer, "My Pet Dog," she added, "Isn't that a nice story." This child, typical of all children, enjoys poetry.

A time soon comes when the theme of the poem is something that has not come within the range of the actual experience of the child. Through lack of knowledge, experience and power of imagination the child cannot appreciate, cannot get the mental vision, cannot understand. Hence he does not enjoy, in fact he dislikes poetry. The lesson has changed from a reading lesson only to a lesson in literature.

The teacher has now to take the first and most important step in the teaching of a poem. Upon the success of the first step depends almost entirely the success of the lesson. I consider the first step so important that I intend to dwell upon it at some length. The first step in the teaching of a poem is the preparation. By preparation I do not mean the preparation of the lesson by the pupil, neither do I mean the preparation of the lesson by the teacher; but rather the preparation of the mind of the pupil to receive the lesson; the calling up of the experience of the pupils, of their reading, of what they may have heard. All this should be done before the lesson is presented.

Sir Galahad. Before a boy can read so as to appreciate Sir Galahad, for this is a boy's poem, the teacher must make the proper preparation. Chivalry should first be discussed. What splendid types of young men the knights were who lived up to their vows and obeyed the precept "Be courteous, valiant, and loyal." Study next one particular group of knights, those of King Arthur and his Round Table. Let the pupils tell all they can. The teacher can direct and supplement, telling about the Siege Perilous and that which was writ-