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PENMANSHIP.

PENMANSHIP is certainly among the most important branches taught in our public schools, yet there is reason to fear that in too many instances, it is regarded both by teacher and trustee as if it were only of secondary value. Whatever qualifications for entering a store or an office a boy may otherwise possess—he may be a good arithmetician, diligent at his work, and in every way trustworthy, but if he writes a careless, slovenly or badly formed hand, the value of his other qualifications will be lessened, and the chances of profitable employment and advancement diminished. Few acquirements in elementary education will so subserve the interest of a boy just leaving school and seeking an occupation, as that of writing a legible, neat and clear hand. If part of the time spent on studies of really little or no value to the pupil, because not relating in any way to his future work, was spent in the more careful and critical study of a business-like chirography, the result would be of no uncertain value, and a thorough drill in this direction turned to good account.

Our system of public instruction aims to make the pupil a good penman, to accomplish which, for a number of years, copy books were supplied at half cost, and especial inducements offered for the culture of the art of writing a good hand; and it is to be hoped that such encouragement has not been void of good results.

The use of Copy Books with lithographic "head lines" on each page is of great advantage, as it keeps a good specimen continually before the pupil, and prevents that continual change of style, so often seen in classes which practise writing without such copies. It also economizes the teacher's time, and helps him to a very desirable uniformity in his method of instruction, for these and other considerations, Copy Books with "head lines" are almost universally used.

Recently we have received a very excellent little book entitled a "Manual of Penmanship," by Payson, Dunton and Scribner, and sold at the book store of Connolly & Kelly, of this City. We give below some extracts from the Manual on the method of instruction, and at the same time commend the work to the attention of the teachers of our public schools, as containing many valuable suggestions and hints, and furnishing teachers correct information on a system of penmanship very generally adopted, and continually increasing in public favor. The author thus presents his views, on the

METHOD OF INSTRUCTION.

Under this head we present the fundamental principles on which the teaching of penmanship must depend.

Writing is the correct representation of certain forms to a greater or less extent arbitrary, generally by means of an instrument held in the hand.

Our method, therefore, naturally ranges itself under these three grand divisions in their order: first, Knowledge; second, Execution; third, Criticism. There is something to be done, and there must be a best way of doing it: both these must be known. The doing follows. And then the questions immediately arise, Is it correctly done? and, Was it done in the best manner? These are answered by criticising.

KNOWLEDGE.—Teachers and scholars, therefore, should know exactly,—

I. What the proposed work itself really is: that is, the Matter to be Executed.

II. How to execute the proposed work: that is, the Manner of Executing.

I. **THE MATTER TO BE EXECUTED.**—This embraces a thorough knowledge (1.) Of the elements; (2.) Of the six principles of the small letters and of the three principles of the capitals, and of their connection to form letters; (3.) Of the distinction between main and connecting lines, and of turns and angles; (4.) Of the peculiarities arising from the combination of letters in words. These are all separately treated in their proper place.

II. **THE MANNER OF EXECUTING.**—This involves a correct knowledge (1.) Of the position of the body, of the arms and the hands, and of the books; (2.) Of penholding; (3.) Of the rests; (4.) Of the movements. All these will be found treated of at length under their respective heads.

METHOD OF IMPARTING KNOWLEDGE.

The question naturally arises, What is the best method of imparting this knowledge? We answer,—

First, with regard to the Matter to be Executed.

1. The teacher must himself know what is to be done, and how it is to be done.

There is no better way for him to learn this than by taking the book his scholars are to use, and writing it himself in advance from day to day. His own writing will be improved, and he will acquire a lively appreciation of the number of minute points which require attention, and of the difficulties to be encountered.

Let him also study the directions and explanations of this Manual, pen in hand. Many a statement, which, if merely read, would obtain little if any appreciation, will be found to be of great importance if subjected at once to the test of experiment.

Having thus qualified himself, however poor a writer he may be, he will come before his class with confidence.

2. He should elicit from his class by questions all that they can discover by observation of the copy and from the instructions at the head of the page, and should tell them the critical points, which will be found in "this Manual" in the description of the letters.

It is an excellent rule never to tell them any thing they can find out for themselves. They will thus be trained to habits of careful observation,—the true method of acquiring the foundations of all knowledge.

3. He should use the blackboard freely.

Let him rule the lines on the board corresponding to the copy, using red as well as white chalk if convenient. Then require the class to dictate the copy to him, doing exactly what they tell him. This shows them the necessity of exact knowledge.

Next give the illustrations which will be found in the descriptions of the letters, and call attention especially to the critical points. The latter should be impressed on their minds till they are thoroughly familiar and can be readily stated.

4. The forms and critical points of the principles should be fixed on their minds.

(1.) By example.—Let them be drawn correctly on the board.

(2.) By contrast.—Let the opposite be drawn.

(3.) By comparison.—Let erroneous forms be made; not all possible ones, but those that illustrate the various points in the description, especially the critical points.

REMARK.—It should ever be borne in mind, that a clear mental conception of the form to be written is an absolute necessity before it can be easily and correctly executed.

And, farther, it should be remembered that time and varied presentation are necessary to enable the mind to form the required conception.