

Education.

MORAL AND LITERARY TRAINING IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

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I shall not discuss the methods by which English literature is now taught in our high schools and colleges, as the literary work which I shall advocate in this paper will not interfere in the least with that which these institutions are endeavoring to accomplish, but will be supplementary to their noble work. That my position may not be misunderstood, I desire to say in the outset that I am decidedly in favour of retaining the present systematic study of English literature as a *distinct branch* in these institutions; instead of substituting anything for this work, as some erroneously suppose, I would give much more of it. In my opinion, however, our *high school course of study in English literature should begin with the authors of to-day (American) and go back to Chaucer*, instead of beginning with Chaucer and coming down to the present time.

I desire, before entering fully on my subject, to call the attention of educators to some of the mistakes that must be corrected before the public schools of our country can reach the highest standard of excellence in literary and moral training. One of these is the disproportionate amount of time given to the subject of arithmetic. Arithmetic has been and ever must be one of the fundamental branches of our common school curriculum, and I yield to no man in my estimate of the importance of the subject both in regard to what is usually considered as its practical bearing on the business affairs of life, and on its excellence as a means of mental discipline. Nor am I among those who would reduce the course of study in arithmetic to a few subjects, to those only that are generally considered necessary for all to know, to that only which is called "practical." Practical! there is a higher aspect of the practical than the mere use that some of us make of it in adding up our grocers' bills, or perchance in calculating discount and interest. The mental discipline, the intellectual power that the scholar obtains by the study of this subject, is the *really practical result of such a course*. It will not do to confine our course of study in mathematics to that only which popular opinion considers practical. I object, therefore, not that there is too much ground covered in arithmetic, or that it is too well taught, but that there is too much time given to it.*

President Andrews, of Marietta, Ohio, says that more than half the time of the schools of that State, outside of the cities and large towns, is given to arithmetic. Think of it; more time de-

*This has grown out of the notion of parents and teachers that the more time is given to a study, the more the pupils will necessarily learn of that study. Paradoxical as it may seem, the children of our district schools would learn as much arithmetic as they now do, if less than half the present amount of time were given to it. A child can learn something of many subjects, and not much of any one. It can learn as much arithmetic in one hour a day as in ten; for in the hour its mind will take in what it can assimilate, and any attempt to teach it more than this becomes a cramming process, and defeats its own end.

Teachers should therefore bear in mind, in making out their timetables of study, that only a limited amount of time per day can be profitably given to any one subject in the lower grades of the schools.

It will be remembered that in London a few years ago half-time schools were established for the youth who were compelled by necessity to work in factories, etc. The school inspectors thought, of course, the pupils who attended these schools could accomplish only one half as much as those who attended the full time. Imagine their astonishment to find, after thorough investigation, that the half-time pupils not only kept up with the others, but surpassed them. Let me say, by way of parenthesis, that the fault of too much study for children lies in the direction of cramming, and not in the variety of studies; that diversity in mental labor is less laborious than dwelling on a few subjects. As many subjects, therefore, as can be taught well should be taught.

voted to this one subject than to reading, writing, spelling, geography, and grammar combined; none to literature and composition! And what is true of the schools in Ohio in this respect, is true of those of most of the other States. Let the teachers of these schools cut down the time given to this subject to within the bounds of reason; introduce composition, letter-writing, and business forms; let them stop working puzzles in mathematics which are about as profitable as the famous fifteen puzzle, and turn their attention to reading, to improving themselves in literature, to acquainting themselves with the lives and writings of great authors; and let them take the results of that work into their school-rooms, and they will revolutionize the country schools of the United States.

In our city schools, less time is allotted in the programmes; still, taking into consideration the amount of home work required of the pupils, and the extra time taken to "bring up" the arithmetic, it is too much. A half-hour per day in the lower grades, and forty minutes in the upper, are amply sufficient. But the teachers have been made to feel that high per cents in arithmetic are the *sine qua non* of their success; hence, cramming for per cents takes the place of judicious teaching, to the great detriment of the pupils.

Fellow teachers, let us use all our influence against this cramming process, and teach according to the natural method; inspire our pupils with nobler aspirations than are to be found in monthly averages; and let the measure of time to be devoted to each subject, be determined, not by the question, How shall we obtain the highest per cents? but by what will benefit our pupils in after-life. This done, and there will not only be better instruction in all branches, but more prominence will be given to language, to composition, and to literature; and our youth will become more intelligent, useful, and influential citizens.

Another mistake—one which has a more direct bearing on my subject,—is the pernicious method of teaching history usually pursued. I refer to the stultifying process of compelling children to commit text-books to memory on this subject. It disgusts the pupils, and gives them a dislike for historical reading. As they take no interest in the subject, it is soon forgotten, and there remains only the bitter recollection of tiresome hours devoted to what, if properly taught, is pleasurable. As one of the principal objects of this paper is to show how to interest our youth in good reading, I will briefly explain, not only how history can be made interesting and instructive to pupils, but how a love of historical research can be implanted in them, that will remain through life, and largely influence their subsequent reading. First, all written percented examinations in this subject should be abolished. What is said in the text-book on the topic under consideration should be read by the pupils under the direction of the teacher. The teacher should see that they understand what they read, and question them in brief review of the previous lesson. He should read parts of other histories or reference books that bear on the subject of the lesson. He should also give questions, the answers to which the pupils should find for themselves, and should encourage them in relating historical anecdotes.

But history should be taught principally by biography. Biography is the soul of history. The life of a great personage, as of Cromwell, Napoleon, or Washington, contains nearly everything of importance in the history of the country in which he lived. Nothing is more entertaining to the young than the lives of the great men and women who have borne a prominent part in the world. This method has been tried for two years in Cincinnati; and in one school alone, more than five hundred historical and biographical sketches were read within the past year, and in one class sixty-one biographical sketches were given by the pupils to their class-mates; and the constant allusion to other lives than those under discussion led to a wide field of research. In a class in United States history, I would not confine the biographical work to our own country, but would encourage children to read and recite sketches of noted personages of other countries. If the method briefly indicated above be pursued, the pupils will become enthusiastic in the subject of history, and will gain a vast amount of information; but above all, they will acquire a taste for reading good books, which will remain with them through life.

(To be continued.)