

## Miscellaneous.

### DIRECT ACTION OF THE PEOPLE IN AID OF COMMON SCHOOLS.

BY S. S. RANDALL, ESQ.

The importance of a *direct and frequent* appeal to the people in behalf of the interests of education may, perhaps, be best illustrated by reference to the example afforded by the experience of the State of Connecticut. Next to Massachusetts, the "the land of steady habits" was the earliest to appreciate and to secure the blessings of an organized system of Common School instruction. In process of time an ample public fund was accumulated and placed in the coffers of the State, from whence the fertilizing streams of a wise, and well-directed beneficence were diffused through every neighbourhood; and up to comparatively a recent period, she contested gallantly with Massachusetts the palm of excellence in this inviting field of competition. Gradually, however, and by degrees, her exertions in behalf of elementary education were relaxed—one after another of her numerous and hitherto well-sustained schools drooped, languished and declined—and for many successive years the strongest efforts of her ablest statesmen and philanthropists to re-ignite the expiring embers of her ancient watch-fires of knowledge and virtue were paralyzed by the apparent lethargy and indifference of the public mind. More recently, however, we are happy to state, a vigorous effort has been made, the success of which is confidently anticipated, to re-organize a system of public instruction, and once more to place this noble State on the eminence she so long occupied in the field of elementary education.

To us, it seems not difficult to assign the proximate cause of the apathy which thus prostrated the energies and relaxed the exertions of the citizens of Connecticut in this, their once cherished department of public enterprise. The habit of *relying upon their ample school fund*—a fund long since accumulated, and early set apart for this specific purpose—and to which few, perhaps, of the existing generation, had in any degree contributed—seemed to dispense with the necessity of personal exertion and individual interest in the management of the schools. These institutions were known to be open to all, virtually, "without money and without price." They were maintained, not by annual taxation, as in Massachusetts, but by a *State fund*, annually brought, without direct co-operation on their part, to their very doors. With or without their presence or supervision, this fund was expended in the employment of teachers; and wherever these teachers were competent to afford that kind and degree of education which the varying tastes of the parents required, they were encouraged and the schools sustained; otherwise their children were withdrawn and sent to select or private schools, while the Common School was left to children of indigent parents, who could not afford to send to more ambitious establishments; and who, however great might be the interest they felt in the prosperity of the District School, possessed none of those means of influence which could augment its usefulness or add to its efficiency.

The absence, then, of that *direct and personal interest* in the institutions for elementary instruction which is afforded by *periodical contributions to their support*, on the part of the citizens generally, and which, as has been seen, so essentially invigorates the working of the Free School system of Massachusetts, is directly calculated to lead, by a sure and intelligible process, to indifference, apathy, neglect and ultimate disorganization. A public fund, however ample and munificent, derived from *the coffers of the State, exclusively*, and to which the citizens are not *directly called upon to contribute*, is not, of itself, sufficient, even when aided by the most unexceptionable organization, to awaken and concentrate that *personal interest* in the efficient administration of a system of public instruction which is indispensable to its success.

### SPELLING.

The best way of spelling by word of mouth which we have ever known, is for the teacher to put out a word to a class, and then wait just long enough for each scholar to spell it mentally and then name a particular scholar to spell it orally. And the utility of this plan increases just in proportion to the number belonging to

the class. It fixes the attention of every scholar, for not one of them knows but he shall be called upon to spell the word. It forbids all wandering, and betrays it if committed. If the class consist of twenty, twenty minds are at work, the moment the word is uttered by the teacher. In the ordinary way of putting out words to a class in rotation, if the class consists of twenty, as soon as one scholar has spelled a word in his turn, he knows that twenty others have to spell before his turn comes again; and away goes his mind, skating, bird's nesting, or playing tops or marbles, until, "in the course of human events," he perceives that another word is coming to him. In the mode first described, each scholar attempts in his mind, the spelling of each word: in the latter, each scholar seldom does more than spell one word in twenty. Compared with the latter process, the former condenses the labour of twenty days into one. Spelling by rotation ought never to be practiced except, perhaps, in the smallest classes of the very youngest children.

Every word, as it is put out to a scholar, should be pronounced precisely as it is uttered by a good reader or speaker, with the same, but with no more slowness or distinctness of utterance. There is a pleasant electrical experiment, where a conducting wire is shaped into the form of letters, which make some word, and on discharging the electricity, it runs up and down the letters and makes each one of them luminous. Now it is not the voice of the teacher in putting out the words, that is to shape out all the letters of the word visibly; but it is the mind of the learner that is to crinkle up and down and make each letter bright and vivid.

The mode of spelling by writing the words put out on slates or paper, has been so often described, that there can scarcely be a teacher in the State unacquainted with it. We make but a single remark as to the mode of examining the words after they have been written. When a list of sufficient length has been written, all the slates or papers may be left with the teacher for his inspection; or he may take one slate or paper from the right or left, and then let each scholar pass his list to his right or left hand fellow. After this is done, let the words be read or rather spelled in order as they are written, and let each deviation from the true orthography be marked for correction.—*Mass. Com. School Journal.*

### CORRECT SPEAKING.

We advise all young people to acquire in early life the habit of using good language, both in speaking and writing, and to abandon as early as possible the use of slang words and phrases. The longer they live the more difficult the acquisition of such language will be; and if the golden age of youth—the proper season for the acquisition of language be passed in its abuse, the unfortunate victim of neglected education is very probably doomed to talk slang for life. Money is not necessary to procure this education. Every man has it in his power. He has merely to use the language he reads instead of the slang which he hears—to form his taste from the best speakers, writers and poets of the country—to treasure up choice phrases in his memory, and habituate himself to their use—avoiding at the same time that pedantic precision and bombast which bespeaks rather the weakness of a vain ambition than the polish of an educated mind. There is no man, however low in rank, who may not materially benefit his financial condition by following this advice, and cultivating at the same time such morals and manners as correspond in character with good words.—*Ex.*

### TEACHING BY EXAMPLE.

The teacher must exhibit in himself all that he wishes to see in his pupils: There is a mighty power in example. All feel it—but children especially. They look up to the teacher as a superior being, and consequently find themselves imitating him. He must, therefore, exhibit an example of self-government, if he expects them to govern themselves—of conscientiousness, if he expects them to be conscientious—of order, if he expects them to maintain it—of punctuality, if he would have them punctual—and of simplicity and truth, if he would have them simple-hearted and truthful. He must, in short, be before them, always, what he would have them be in the school and in the world. There will be a greater power in this than in all the rules and precepts he can lay down, if they are contradicted by his own spirit and conduct; for