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TORONTO, JANUARY, 1879.

THE MOST IMPORTANT OF THE "THREE R's."

Among the important subjects which are discussed at our Teachers' Institutes we are glad to observe that prominence is given to reading and the best methods of teaching it. It must be admitted that this—probably the most important of the "Three R's"—has been too long neglected, or, at least, has not been taught with even a fair degree of efficiency. Its value as a means of cultivation for the vocal organs, and of discipline for both intellect and heart, have not been generally recognized; and while arithmetic and kindred subjects have their enthusiastic teachers and admirers, comparatively little attention has been given to the subject which, beyond all others in the school curriculum, requires the greatest skill and thoroughness on the part of the teacher. The consequences are obvious; the graduates of the schools are neither good readers nor good speakers. Their speaking and reading are marked by imperfect enunciation and a sad lack of expression, to say nothing of the general melody of speech which characterizes the thoroughly educated reader.

The cultivation of the vocal organs ought to begin when the child begins to speak; it ought to be kept constantly in view when the child begins to read. At quite an early age a mastery of the difficult sounds of the language and the *habit* of distinct enunciation, as well as flexibility of voice, may be acquired. But to this end *thorough* teaching is essential.

With but little instruction a child may become tolerably proficient in arithmetic and algebra; but to become a good reader the aid of a capable and thorough teacher is indispensable. He must *hear* correct enunciation to be able by practice to acquire it for himself; he must *hear* a good teacher give the various vowel and consonant sounds with clearness of enumeration and fullness and melody of tone; he must *hear* these sounds given again and again, with an endless variety of pitch, and force, and inflection, and be taught to carefully practise them, if he is to become possessed of the power of delivering at will these elements of correct expression.

It is not enough that the teacher should *speak* of faulty enunciation. Lecturing will not avail—example is what is needed. The teacher may "pour out" any number of facts and principles concerning distinct articulation, proper inflexion,

modulation, &c.; but a single example correctly given would be much more interesting and profitable to the pupils. The way to good reading, like the way to many other things, is long by precept but short by example. From the very beginning of the child's course the teaching must be by *example*—examples of distinct enunciation, proper inflexion, emphasis, and, in a word, of all the elements of correct expression.

Some, we believe, take the ground that it is useless, or worse, to attempt to educate the child to read with expression. Let him, they say, comprehend the meaning of what he reads, and leave the rest to nature—the proper expression of the thought will come without training in the art and science of expression. We hold the opposite opinion; the power of correct expression is not a necessary adjunct of a knowledge of the subject matter. This knowledge is indeed necessary; but it is not sufficient to ensure the perfect expression of the thought. If this were so, good reading would surely be the rule, and bad reading the exception. This theory of "leaving to nature" will never make good readers—at least it never has done so. The children of our schools have been "left to nature," and nature has proved a miserable failure. The unmusical monotone of the primary school-room—the hard metallic tone, the slovenly enunciation, the utter inflexibility of voice—have become proverbial: they are the result of the "leaving-to-nature" theory.

It seems to be thought that, because the simple sentences of the primary reading book are not the vehicles of what is brilliant in thought, there is nothing to be done but to make the child familiar with the forms and sounds of the words in his simple lesson. But even such sentences as "Ned hit Tom a rap," "he ran off to-day to try and get a few nuts," &c., have a meaning, and may be delivered with proper expression. But the child, though quite understanding the meaning, does not read them correctly; he is wrestling with the *forms* of the words, and his expression is therefore the monotone. This is the natural consequence of his early difficulties, and, if not corrected, it becomes a habit which clings to him through all his course. The teacher should, then, from the very first, pay close attention not only to enunciation, but to pitch, emphasis, inflexion and all the elements of true expression. He is not, of course, to "lecture" on inflexion, and modulation, and emphasis, &c.; but he will find that when he himself gives expression to any of these elements, the child will follow his example with the greatest accuracy.

It is not enough that the exercise of reading should subserve the cultivation of the vocal organs and the acquisition of a good delivery; it should be made an instrument for the discipline of the intellect and the emotions. If the subject of the lesson is argumentative, let the pupils fully perceive the cogency of the reasoning, and comprehend the value of the truth it establishes; if it is poetic, let it not fail to touch the imagination; if it enforces some grand moral truth, let it come with quickening influence on the heart—and thus truth for the intellect, beauty for the imagination, and pathos for the heart shall combine their influence in the formation of a character at once of beauty and of power.

It has been said by an American educator that his country-