

* English *

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THE BROOK.

A LESSON IN THIRD READER LITERATURE.

BY "RADICAL."

BEFORE any attempt is made to teach a lesson on the literature of any selection like "The Brook," there should be a clear understanding on the part of the teacher as to the real value of the lesson as a literary product in itself, and then a definite purpose to develop just that particular phase of the selection which seems to him to be its essential constituent.

It is as a product of art that every literary selection should be treated, and let me add that no selection lacking some of the essentials of fine art should find a place in the literary curriculum of the higher forms of our Public schools.

Clearly, then, the method that obtains in the interpretation of a painting or a statue must obtain in the study of a poem; and the first and most obvious inference is that there should be a due regard for the *tout ensemble* of a piece before any attempt is made at the minutiae of analysis.

It is this general view of the whole which affords the real essence of any work of art, which decides the distinctive characteristic of this or that poem for instance, and superadds it to the qualities which it has in common with other specimens of the same class.

Now, then, what is the essential element in the literature of "The Brook," and what are the features which it has in common with other literary selections? In other words, what should be, first, the essential aim, and second, the whole aim of the teacher in developing the lesson?

Something like the following has suggested itself to my mind as a qualitative analysis:

1. To cultivate the imaginative faculty and some of the higher emotions through the interpretation of the æsthetic element in the piece.
2. To gain some insight into the author's relationship to external nature.
3. To train the language faculty through the study of the diction.
4. To impart a certain amount of positive knowledge of locale and environment.
5. (Which may be said of any lesson worth committing to memory.) To train the memory by committing verbatim.

It is not difficult to see that the first aim mentioned above is the distinguishing one. In fact, it is so far the predominant aim that all the others are but as means to that end. And the execution of this leading purpose should result (1) in giving a key to the interpretation of visible nature; (2) in imparting a sense of one or two very important universal, not to say moral, truths; (3) in teaching the inner spiritual meaning of some of the simplest things in nature.

Having settled upon the leading aim of the lesson in relation to the other aims, it remains to be seen what method must of necessity be adopted in order to secure its proper execution.

Clearly, it will not do to begin with a drill on the force of epithets or phrases unhappily still too common a mode of procedure. Still less will it avail to begin by showing the grammatical function of the various parts of the stanzas, a fatal error which the writer confesses having made in the early part of his experience.

"How, then, shall I begin?" exclaims the would-be literary anatomist. "I have it. I will begin by asking the subject of each stanza in succession, and having settled that these are correct by an examination into the meaning of each sentence, etc. I will piece these together and require the pupils to write a neat little essay on 'The Brook' after the lesson is over."

And I confess that this seems to me the least pernicious of all the methods of introduction mentioned above. Unfortunately, however, it happens that this method will apply with much more satisfactory results to the study of Herbert Spencer's "Data of Ethics" or Burton's "Anatomy of Melancholy."

No, we will not scout the poetic idea by any such summary violation of the canons of the art. Nor

will we join hands with our ancestral pedagogues who triumphantly evaded every difficulty by religiously inquiring of Tom, Harry or Kate, the page, title, number and author of the lesson in routine before asking one of the pupils to read orally the first stanza as a preliminary to the study of the literature of the lesson.

None of these methods will suit. They have the all too lamentable sanction of custom, but will not, we fear, pass with our scientific age.

True science teaches her pupils to begin at the beginning and end at the end. The beginning here is the brook, not "The Brook." Let us begin with the brook. And here let me say that the very best way would be to don hats, lay aside books, and find the brook.

As this perfection of all method is impracticable, however, it remains to settle upon the next best thing in order. Now for the brain of a Mahomet. Happy thought! If we cannot go to the brook we can at least bring the brook within reach.

There are few children so destitute of imagination that they cannot assist the teacher in getting the mental picture of a brook. Most of them will be familiar with the banks of the old creek in the hollow, or the little river over the hill, or failing in this, the big ditch on the other concession. Very well, then, with these rude materials it will be quite possible to construct a brook.

It will not be difficult for an interested teacher to take these fragmentary conceptions and fuse them with his own larger conception, in order to give a sufficiently fair representation of the visual scene in the author's mind.

This may be supplemented by pictures, or if possible, a rough black-board sketch.

Having done this it will be necessary to work up to the conception of the brook as a living thing. The pupils will readily imagine that its ceaseless murmuring is a voice, and that it is speaking a message, or singing a song.

Then, with every book out of sight, by questioning if may be got from the class that the word "I" must be used if the brook is speaking or singing about itself. Next, in a similar way, get from the class that the most natural question which the brook might answer would be one concerning its source. In this way develop the words "I come from," and write them on the board. Proceed in this way to get such words as *coots, fern, etc.*, using no word *until it has been seen to be necessary* and in each case writing the words on the board as they occur until the stanza has been completed *without the aid of the book*.

Then require some pupil to read the stanza orally from the black-board, or if preferred, let all read it silently. Proceed in this way with two or three stanzas. The third stanza lends itself very readily to this independent treatment. Did space permit it it might be shown that every idea and every important word in the stanza may be developed in this way without so much as a glance at the book or the telling of a word.

After the third stanza has been formed by the pupils for themselves they will be able to catch the spirit of the true interpretation of each stanza, and will be able to proceed with books open to the study of the following stanzas.

Whenever it is seen, however, that pupils are relapsing into textual routine, every book should be shut and a stanza or two developed by the pupils for themselves. This part of the method will embrace the execution of the first and second aims given above. The lesson should then be gone over again; this time for the particular study of the words used. Synonyms should be given, both the local and general force of epithets shown; figures of speech fully developed, and more minute descriptions of the environments secured.

The lesson should then be gone over a third time for the sake of the versification. In this special attention should be paid to the character of the metre, the musical effect of alliteration, the jingle of the rhyme, and the effect of repetitions.

When all this has been done it will be quite in order to require a neat essay written on "The Brook" in the third person, the brook being the thing spoken about rather than the speaker.

The lesson may be aptly concluded by requiring some of the most beautiful and expressive stanzas to be committed to memory, and a partial test of the pupil's appreciation of these or the oral reading of any part of the lesson.

Treated in the above manner such a selection

would, of course, cover two or three or even four distinct lessons, but when completed will be of more value to the pupil in the formation of a pure literary taste and the cultivation of a love for the beautiful than whole screeds of patchwork analysis, the worst feature of which is that the culture which it secures is in inverse ratio to the time spent in its prosecution.

APPENDIX.

Treatment of third stanza (with closed books):
 "What does the brook do?" Ans. "It flows."
 Write the two words, "I flow," on the board.
 "Where does the brook flow to?" Ans. "To the river."
 "Do all little creeks and brooks flow into rivers?" Ans. "Yes."
 "If they do, what will happen to the river?" Ans. "It will get full."
 "Very full?" "Yes."
 "How full, perhaps?" Ans. "Till it runs over."
 "What word means running over?" No answer.
 "What do you call the upper edge of a cup?" Ans. "The brim."
 "If the cup were so full that the water ran over the brim, what would you say about the cup?" Ans. "It is brimming full."
 "What kind of river may you call this, then?" "A brimming river."
 Write the words on the board:

"I flow
brimming river."

"What does the brook flow for?" Ans. "To join the river." Write down l. 2,

"I flow
To join the brimming river."

"Does it get there?" "Yes."
 "Does it stop then?" "No."
 "What does it do?" "Keeps on going."
 "Does it never stop?" "No."
 "How long will it flow then?" "For ever."
 "What may the brook say of itself then?" "I go on for ever."
 Write these words on the board. Similarly develop every idea and word in l. 3 writing it down when secured and then supply the rest of l. 1.

THE NEW-MOWN HAY.

EVERY one knows the beautiful rendering Tennyson has given in "Lord Burleigh" of the famous incident in the history of the Cecil family. Those who are interested in the dead laureate's version will find some pleasure in reading the following village-version of the same incident. It is printed in an old volume entitled, *Ancient Ballads and Songs of the Peasantry of England*, edited by Robert Bell. The editor notes that "the adventure has, strangely enough, been made the subject of one of the most romantic of Moore's 'Irish Melodies,' viz., 'You Remember Helen, the Hamlet's Pride.'"

As I walked forth one summer's morn,
 Hard by a river's side,
 Where yellow cowslips did adorn
 The blushing field with pride;
 I spied a damsel on the grass,
 More blooming than the May,
 Her looks the queen of Love surpassed,
 Among the new-mown hay.

I said, "Good morning, pretty maid,
 How came you here so soon?"
 "To keep my father's sheep," she said,
 "The thing that must be done:
 While they are feeding 'mong the dew,
 To pass the time away,
 I sit me down to knit or sew,
 Among the new-mown hay."

Delighted with her simple tale,
 I sat down by her side;
 With vows of love I did prevail
 On her to be my bride:
 In strains of simple melody,
 She sung a moral lay;
 The little lambs stood listening by,
 Among the new-mown hay.

Then to the church they went with speed
 And Hymen joined them there;
 No more her ewes and lambs to feed,
 For she's a lady fair:
 A lord he was that married her,
 To town they came straightaway;
 She may bless the day he spied her there,
 Among the new-mown hay.