

THE ART OF READING—WHAT MAY YET BE DONE.

Before leaving this point, I wish particularly to mention one striking proof of what yet remains to be done in even the most elementary parts of education; I refer to the art of reading. We sometimes collect statistics to show what proportion of the population can read. We mean by this what proportion can gather something of the sense of an author for themselves; but if we speak of the proper and effective reading of an author in the hearing of others, then there must be a vast alteration of our statistics. In this sense how many men are there in Canada who can read? How many even of educated men? How many of college graduates? How many of the professors? It is a poor solace to know that it is as bad elsewhere as in Canada. Every thoughtful mind must rejoice in the recent awakening of a new interest on this subject. These popular readings are yet destined to do much for the improvement and entertainment of the people. A talent for public speaking has always been a power in the earth, but the capability of adequately rendering, I say adequately rendering, the words of another, is scarcely less valuable. Genius is a rare gift, but to read well is to put the world in possession of the fruits of genius. Shakespeare, Milton, Tennyson, Macaulay, and all the great masters of prose and song are made to speak to us with the living voice. The sympathy of many hearts redoubles the power of what is said, and we rise to a higher sphere of thought and feeling, as by a kind of enchantment. Thousands pour with delight over the pages of Homer, but Homer as he thrilled the heart when sung by the Rhapsodists of old, this is a pleasure enjoyed no more. One printing-press is doubtless worth ten thousand wandering minstrels, but if some one would invent a press for the manufacture of good readers, we should have, if not another revival of learning, what is not less to be desired, an enkindling of a new intellectual life in the breasts of many who have heard indeed the names of our noble poets, but who have never yet learned to love or enjoy them. I speak especially of the poets, for of all writing, true poetry lies perhaps nearest to the common heart, and is best adapted to furnish a counterpoise to many of the dangerous tendencies of the age. A celebrated elocutionist, when asked who taught him to read, answered, "My mother;" and, as a general rule, women read better than men, as they also speak better English. The cause of this fact, and the use to be made of it, I must leave for others to show; but I commend the whole subject to the careful study of the members of this Association.

TRAMMELS OF SYSTEM—CAUTIONS.

Having spoken of improvement in systems of instruction, permit me to caution you against the trammels of system. There is some danger of "red-tapeism" even in the school-room. The good teacher will observe closely and handle tenderly the idiosyncrasies of children. Nature gives us only individuals, and no two alike. Classification is man's work, and is always a kind of mutilation of the fact. The abstractions of the system builder are often as misleading as the fancies of the poet—both the one and the other needing to be corrected by constant reference to the actualities of life. All children may have the same faculties; but these faculties are combined in innumerable ways. As soon expect precisely the same cast of countenance as precisely the same bias of mind. An Oriental shepherd distinguishes his sheep by their faces; in this country a clever farmer can distinguish a black sheep from a white one, or a sheep from a lamb. Most schoolmasters can do better than that as regards the body; but the colour and shape of the immortal part often escapes them. "Best men," says Shakespeare, "are moulded out of faults." The faults of the child are often a clue to his capacities and the germs of what might be his virtues. But how much skill is required to make the transformation? It is impossible by education to run children like bullets all in one mould, and it would be no addition to the charm of life could it be done. Symmetry of culture is well enough; but nature has her own types and laws of symmetry which we must study and not force. I invite your attention to the following passages from the last work of Mrs. Stowe:—"It was the fashion of olden times to consider children only as children pure and simple; not as having any special individual nature which required special and individual adaptation, but as being simply so many little creatures to be washed, dressed, schooled, fed and whipped, according to certain general and well-understood rules. The philosophy of modern society is showing to parents and educators how delicate and how varied is their task; but in the days we speak of, nobody had thought of these shadings and variations." Again: "I was reading Mr. John Locke's treatise on education yesterday," said Miss Mahetable. "It strikes me there are many good ideas in it." "Well, one live child puts all your treatises to rout," said my grandmother. "There ain't any two children alike; and what works with one won't with another. Folks have just got to open their eyes, and look and see what the

Lord meant when he put the child together, if they can, and not stand in his way." We learn from the biography of Prescott that he could never get up his Euclid except by committing to memory the words of the book, a form of recitation from which his professor thought it as well to excuse him. How far these peculiarities are to be humoured is indeed a nice question; but this is no reason why we should wholly ignore them. The parent will sometimes ask a teacher, "What shall I make of my boy?" After three or four years' acquaintance, a master of a Grammar School, or a College professor, should have something more than a random reply to such a question. Such is the diversity of human pursuits that there is room for the widest diversity of taste and talent, and the success of life is often marred by the stupidity of those who, determining to make mathematicians out of Prescotts, deprive the world of much fine literature or other valuable products, and add nothing to the progress of mathematics. Education is a preparation for life, and the most useful lives are those which concentrate a man's powers mainly in one direction, and that according to the star under which he was born.

APPEAL TO HIGHER MOTIVES—THE ROD.

My last observation is that the teacher should appeal as much as possible to the higher motives. Fear, as an instrument of discipline, is not to be discarded. I would not have a teacher say to his school, "I never flog." Philosophers tell us of what they call "latent consciousness." There should be in every school a latent consciousness of the rod, and this will need occasionally to be developed, and as it were brought to the surface by a vigorous application of the rod to some dozing offender who may be taken as a kind of "representative man." But the best teacher is one who secures good order and progress without much flogging. Let the formula be the maximum of progress with the minimum of whipping. It is easy to flog, especially for a big man to flog little children; it is natural to flog; there are so many temptations to flog; so many occasions on which this method seems to be necessary, that it becomes with some teachers a kind of "royal road to knowledge," a sort of catholicon to cure all diseases, like "Radway's Ready Relief," or other nostrums of the day. That dull boy must be flogged, though possibly his dullness may be but the slow development of great powers which flogging will not hasten. That truant boy must be flogged, though a proper system of gymnastics and recreation might have prevented his playing truant. That tardy boy must be flogged, though his tardiness may have been the fault of his parents. That equivocating boy must be flogged, though his equivocation be the result of timidity, which flogging does but increase. Some teachers seem to think they best discharge their obligations by discharging the big ruler at the heads of the children; according to others, the tree of knowledge is the birch. The old adage warns us not to flog when angry; but the fact is the presence of anger and the absence of moral power are the chief causes of flogging. The true teacher will love and reverence children, and feel his way as quickly and skilfully as possible to their better nature. Fear, at best, is only an instrument; but the love of knowledge, self respect, respect for teacher and parent, the love of excellence, the sense of right, these are not only higher instruments, but ends in themselves. To appeal to them is to evoke them, to establish them as living forces of the soul. The worst thing a teacher can do is to lose faith in children, and to let them see that he has lost faith in them. By despairing of them, we teach them to despair of themselves. Let us rather cultivate an invincible trust, and by that trust enkindle hope and aspiration. How much better to praise a child for his merits than to scold him for his faults! It is said of that prince of educators, the great Dr. Arnold, that he never seemed to doubt a boy's veracity, and that for this reason no boy ever told him a lie. Not unfrequently the surest way to reclaim a vicious boy is to give him an errand or office of trust. Here lies the great test of the teacher's skill, in this discovery and development of the dormant capacity of children for higher and better things. The instrument that lies dumb or yields only sounds of discord in the hands of the tyro will pour out floods of melody under the touch of a master. The general on the field of battle speaks not to the soldier of his sixpence a day, or of the lash, but of honour, of country, of fame, of duty; speaks to him as a man and he becomes one. Thus the most grovelling natures are found to have within them the slumbering instincts of heroism. The greatest teachers, like the greatest commanders, have the power to enkindle this enthusiasm. The time will come when we shall hear no more of irreclaimable children, or even of irreclaimable men. Experience has shown that men hardened by long years of vice may be reached and restored to virtue—restored not by every untutored or half-hearted meddler, but by the man of large sympathy and special aptitude for the work. As the prophet, stretching himself upon the widow's child, called back the flush of health and the power of thought, so there is a way by which life may be awak-