

ences, if she lets her pupils decide for themselves whether they will rather read a beautiful story or have the teacher relate it to them. In nine cases out of ten they will unanimously decide for the latter.

If this be admitted to be true, the very important question presents itself: Can the school be expected to conquer such dislike, and how may it be done?

I am free to answer the first part of the question in the affirmative, and shall also endeavor to show how it may be done; but first let me call your attention to the phenomenon which has doubtless come under the observation of most of us.

Let us take a boy of eight coming to school for the first time, perfectly illiterate, but possessed of common sense, who is put into your lowest class, *i. e.*, among children of six. Do you not always find that such a child will learn to read remarkably fast, and not only be, in a very short time, equal to the best of his class, but even catch up with children of his age, who have spent two years at school, when our boy enters it; and in most cases this boy will be found superior in observation and understanding and in expressing his own thoughts.

Very few teachers, if any, will deny the above illustration to be one of every day occurrence.

The cause of this cannot be well looked for in the advanced age of the boy, nor in his bodily development, for the very reason that school children of six grow older and develop also; it cannot be said that the boy has intelligent parents, relations, &c., for such is the case with six-year-old school children too, and besides the intelligence of the teacher is often superior to that of many parents. Is it then the child's absence from school which has worked so much in his favor? Not necessarily so. But it is certainly the development of thought and speech, which the boy has experienced during the two years which others have spent at school spelling and reading.

The little six-year-old has no correct idea of the subject of which his lesson in the primer treats, while the boy of eight, just entering school, knows at once that the sentence, "It is an ox," refers to a little picture opposite it, representing an ox. He knows probably something about it, and a whole chain of ideas starts in his mind, while reading this and similar sentences;

he is eager to know more about it, and learns fast to read and to spell.

Our boy was taught by nobody, he did not know a single letter, but he had used his senses, he had observed, reflected on objects, which interested him, and had spoken whenever there was something to communicate. Should our schools, perfect in many respects as they are, not be able to do more and better work than mere chance? Most assuredly so. We can do it, if we condescend to copy after nature.

And now I shall return to the question, "How may the dislike toward books be conquered in schools?"

Children upon entering school encounter a book with black characters, all arranged in straight lines, and now and then a black picture—it is the primer. In it they read continually the ideas of others and spell the words—for little children certainly a dreary work, and it cannot be wondered at that they are glad when the recitation is over—they will naturally look upon books as their privileged tormentors.

Take away these tormentors from the first grade entirely. Make the children speak. Show them objects or pictures, and lead them to produce oral composition; tell them stories about the pictures, and make them relate them to you in return; and verily you will see bright eyes, smiling faces, and hear intelligent words and phrases enough in your room.

Do not fear that the pet child of our schools—discipline—will suffer by this, for a soft word from a teacher, who is a source of so much joy to the little ones, works wonders in an animated class.

Change the subject frequently; take objects from nature, especially animals and living plants; explain their mode of existence, &c.; and thus the first grade might well be excused from a lesson in "natural science" lasting an hour.

This mode of teaching the first grade will stock the minds of the little children with a vast amount of knowledge, received directly from the senses; it will lead them to form combinations, draw comparisons, and will under the guidance of a careful and intelligent teacher train them to express their thoughts in concise and correct language.

Combine with this, singing, arithmetic, drawing, writing and reading script, and