

THE PROBLEM OF TEACHING TO READ.

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(Continued from last month.)

But perhaps the words which we received from the Norman-French settlers—words, several thousands of which we still have, like *palace*, *peer*, *parliament*, and others—will be of better and more regular formation, and will help the child with kindly experiences. Perhaps the symbols in them will be always true to the sounds; and the sounds to the symbols. Not so. The case is nearly as bad in the Norman-French words as in English. The two malformations exist there in quite as pronounced a fashion, though not in quantity so large. Thus we have the first malformation—the case of the *fixity* of the symbol, and the *fluctuation* and uncertainty of the sound:

T ou rist = oo
P ou ltry = o
C ou nty = ou
C ou ntry = ū

And we have also the second malformation, where the *one* sound is rendered to the eye in several *various* forms—where the sound is *fixed*, and the symbol *fluctuates*.—Thus we have:

Iss ue
V iew
B eau ty
N ui sance
N ew } = u

And

P eo ple
Rec ei ve
Rel ie f
Fat i gue
Est ee m } = ē

Now an alphabet which spells a long *ē* with an *eo*, or an *ie*, or an *ei*, or an *i*; or which spells a long *ū* with an *ue*, or an *iew*, or an *eau*, is not one which is of very great value for the learner. It is an alphabet which is true to its past; but the gold lace and the cord and the tags and the broad flaps and the other ancient decorations of the coat only serve to make its inadequacy to the use of the child all the more marked and ridiculous.

What, now, of the *LATIN* NOTATION? It is quite regular; as is plain from the following:

D ate	Sound	Con sume
R ate		
St ate	Symbol	Re sume
In fer	always in	Sub vert
Re fer	Complete	In vert
Con fer	Accord	Con vert

But, though it is so perfectly regular, unfortunately for its use to us as teachers, its vocabulary relates to a set of conceptions which do not exist in the mind of a child. What child learning to read knows or understands the words *resume*, *invert*, or *refer*? The Latin words in our language are terms more or less abstract; they are the algebraical marks for totals of experience which the child has never had; they form ideas or marks for a multitude of data not one of which has ever been placed in the child's daily life or experience. Our Latin notation must, therefore, for our present purpose, be left out of the count.

Now the two double and doubly fallacious notations of English and Norman-French are mixed up in ordinary speech and narrative; and the child is set to learn this mixture. He has to work

it into his mind by some process which it is very difficult for us to ascertain or to value. What is his actual experience, as he goes through this process? The following is the

EXPERIENCE OF HIS EYE:

1. B oat	} = ō	1. W ise	} = i + s.
2. T oe		2. B uys	
3. Y eo man		3. P ies	
4. S ou l		4. Eyes	
5. S ow		5. S ize	
6. S ew		6. G uize	
7. N ote		7. S ighs	
8. B eau			
9. H au thoy			
10. Owe			
11. Fl oo r			
12. Oh!			
13. O!			

Here he sees a long *ō* written down in thirteen different ways. Amongst this confusion, he meets with such signs as *w* in *once* or *gh* in *sigh*, which represent a vanished guttural. He sees a long *i* with an *s* printed in seven different ways; and yet the sound he renders it by is always the same.

Under these circumstances, the scholar's confidence in what he sees is shaken; he cannot believe his eyes.

On the other hand, the following is the

EXPERIENCE OF HIS EAR:

1. S ea m	} One Symbol equal to Six Sounds.
2. St ea k	
3. Ea rth	
4. H ea rth	
5. Br ea d	
6. Y ea	
1. Conc ei ve	} One Symbol equal to Four Sounds.
2. H ei ght	
3. V ei n	
4. H ei fer	

The child is told six different ways of sounding one mark. He cannot believe his ears.

But the eyes and ears of the child are the only channels for his knowledge—the only avenues to learning; and, if these are blocked up, it is difficult for knowledge to get into his mind.

The eye is trifled with, and a multitude of confusing appearances presented to it; and so the attention and memory of the child are weakened from the very outset.

The ear is not kept faith with; the child has to give different sounds to the same symbol; what sound to give is always a question with him; and so his judgment is puzzled.

There is no firm footing in the symbol—that is susceptible of the most various interpretations; there is no reliance on the sound—that varies even with the same symbol, or remains the same with the most contradictory-looking symbols. The child cannot trust to his senses; these are outraged and disappointed in every way. The teacher must, therefore, train the child's *mind*; he must look to every quarter of the intellectual horizon for what help he can get. He must also train or arrange the *mind of the language*, that is, he must so engineer it as to provide a gentle gradient for the children to walk up.

What the child has to do is not merely to make himself acquainted with 26 symbols of a fixed and permanent value, but with a very large number of self-contradictory habits of a people who were never allowed by circumstances to reach a harmonious develop-