

importance in all the relations of life, is it not strange that it occupies a place in the *background* in the great majority of our schools? It is submitted in all candor, in view of its importance, if the art of writing should not be placed in the *foreground* of our educational plans. Is not its natural order next to that of reading? Is not its importance second to none but that? But what are the facts in the case? Until very recently it has almost been ignored as a branch of study in our public schools. While we are in advance of the United States in many branches of science, we are far behind them in penmanship. A reform so sadly needed in this country is now being brought about.

In most of our cities and important towns this subject is of late receiving special attention. In many instances, writing-masters who teach this subject scientifically and upon principles as clear and satisfactory as that of other branches, have recently been employed, and the results of such teaching convince us that it is only through means of proper and systematic instruction that the desideratum of a good hand-writing can be procured by every pupil that comes fairly under the influence of our public school system.

While satisfactory evidences of progress and improvement are now manifesting themselves in our large schools, located in towns and cities and possessing special advantages, country schools, representing by far the largest part of our school population, we find in many instances still encumbered by the ancient methods of instruction followed by our forefathers, viz., *Imitation and Practice*. These terms, in their vaguest sense, seem to have complete possession, not only of the public mind, but also of the minds of the majority of teachers.

The writing exercise is, consequently, in many schools an unmeaning and uninviting ceremony, willingly omitted or laid aside for those of a more interesting, but not more important nature.

While it is indeed true that *Imitation and Practice* are the chief means by which penmanship is acquired, it is all important to the pupil to know how to imitate and how to practice, that the best attainable results may be arrived at in the shortest possible time.

In order to effect this, the chalk and blackboard must be freely used by the teacher in connection with every writing lesson, and the proper mode of practicing the copy fully explained and illustrated.

In early boyhood I attended a number of different public schools, and was instructed therein by no less than ten different teachers. While many of these were well qualified, able, and practical teachers of other subjects, not one of them knew how to teach penmanship properly, or ever attempted the use of the blackboard to illustrate and explain writing lessons.

The course usually pursued by these teachers was to sit at their desk during the time allotted to this subject and write head-lines for imitation, or, in case engraved copies were used, their time was devoted to some of the junior classes, and those engaged at penmanship were allowed to practice in accordance with the dictates of their own fancy. The consequence was that some pupils would be writing one copy and some another; and instead of practicing carefully and critically, the object in most instances would be to see who could get over the greatest space in a given time.

This style of teaching penmanship is still in vogue in many of our public schools. There are still

many teachers engaged in the work who never use the blackboard in connection with their writing lessons, and as a natural result their pupils show far less improvement than those who have been sufficiently fortunate to be under more practical and enthusiastic teachers.

Success in the management of writing classes, whether in public schools or colleges, depends almost entirely upon a proper use of the blackboard.

The live practical teacher will first explain the copy on the board, then call the attention of his class to the errors in formation, slant, shade, spacing, turns, &c., that they are liable to run into; point out the way to avoid them, and by a few pointed and well-timed remarks inspire an interest and enthusiasm in his pupils which will occasion them to practice with that zeal and critical earnestness which ensures success. I venture the assertion that any teacher who understands how to criticize and explain penmanship, even though he be not a good penman himself, and keeps up an interest in his pupils by a free and proper use of blackboard illustrations, will be able to show more improvement in three weeks' time than those adopting the old plan of allowing a class to imitate and practice according to individual fancy can in as many months.

It is often asked, "Which is preferable; engraved or written copies?" My answer is, that engraved copies are decidedly the best in any school or college in which there is not a professional penman, or a teacher who can write sufficiently well that his copies may be used as proper models for imitation. For the following reasons—Copies are the means relied on as the subjects for imitation by learners, until such time as the mind becomes sufficiently impressed with the forms and essentials of good writing to dispense with them. Copies should therefore contain that, and that only, which it is designed shall be imitated, and should be so executed and presented as to develop in the mind of a learner the clearest and most definite ideal of form, slant, shade, spacing, and all the other characteristics of good writing. It is not for me to speak disparagingly of the writing of our teachers. I know that there are among them some excellent penmen and many very bad writers. The question is, can the handwriting of all our teachers, required to teach this subject, be presented as proper models for the imitation of pupils?

The difference between success and failure in teaching penmanship lies in a clear conception of the different steps in its acquisition, and a rigid adherence to the fundamental principles of the Art; and, above all, the ability to stimulate endeavor in the pupil, whether by the teacher's own skill as a penman, or his power to control and direct to successful results by black-board illustrations and criticisms as formerly explained.

It must be recognized that the lesson in Writing is an *active exercise*, in which both teacher and pupil are to participate for the purpose of promoting dexterity in the use of the pen by the pupil, and that the pupil naturally looks to the teacher for his model and guide in his *modus operandi*, as he does to his copy for the matter to be written.

Hence it follows that the teacher must be on the alert, active, wide awake, and attentive to the work in hand, and thus furnish a proper personal example for the pupil's imitation, as well as the precepts which are to guide his performance.

No exercise of the schoolroom calls for more *physical exertion* on the part of the teacher than in-