

Elocutionary Department.

HOW TO READ POETRY.

BY R. LEWIS.

THE vocal reading of poetry is the worst reading we hear. It is utterly expressionless. It is worse. However excellent the composition may be, the thoughts, the passion, the most splendid conceptions of the highest genius, clothed in language of surpassing force and beauty, all are marred, disfigured, wearisome to hear, often unintelligible to the hearer, however high the culture of the reader, when read in the usual style, and if universal experience be our standard for judgment, we may safely pronounce the reading of poetry to be, as generally heard, an art obsolete. Rhythmical accentuation is its only consistent feature. That feature marks and distinguishes the reading of poetry, whether sacred or secular. Have we no better title to distinguish the latter from the former? We have poetry classed under the latter title so divine in its conceptions and emotions that no hymns of the churches can surpass it in religious fervor and sublimity. But whatever the nature or character of the poetry there is no difference or distinction in the vocal reading. It is all alike—bad. In one respect it claims distinction: the methods of reading never vary. In that respect there is perfect regularity, unbroken harmony, in the manner of reading. The reader is guided by an unerring rule. He never neglects to sustain with all its wretched monotony the metrical accentuation. Prosodial rules of accentuation only are observed, to the utter destruction of all expression. The difficulty is the greater because the reader is unconscious of the defect. He is the slave of the poetical forms, which in their place, in their musical regularity of rhythm, and of rhyme when it is used, give the charms of verbal harmony to the composition. An attempt is sometimes made in books for elocutionary training to prevent this sing-song mode of reading poetry by printing it in prose arrangement, as if it were the appearance of the poetry which caused the bad reading, a pitiful attempt to deceive the reader. And it deservedly fails, because the regularity of the metrical forms is too strong, when the reader is not guided by the higher law, the thought and emotions of a passage, not its verbal expression, to give the expression free from the emphasized accentuation. How is this defect in reading poetry to be corrected and prevented? There is no space in these brief articles to give full details of a general method of reading poetry with due expression, and of sustaining the metrical forms without making them so prominent as to destroy or weaken the expression; but the following suggestions are submitted for the guidance of the student:

1. Master the thought of the poem and express it in prose; paraphrase it, transposing the words and changing the forms so as to make it impossible to allow the regular recurrence of metrical forms. This should be the introduction to the reading of every poem when a class is to be instructed.

2. When relational words, prepositions, etc., are to receive accent, pause before the relational word; poise with longer time on the word preceding it, especially if an expressive word, and combine the relational word, rejecting metrical accent, with the word or words that follow, or with which it is grammatically related, as prepositions or conjunctions with succeeding adjectives and nouns, etc., and combine the words closely related and mutually dependent as one group, forming what Bell calls an oratorical word.* The governing words are generally the noun and the verb; but adjectives, even prepositions may require the chief or primary force when emphasized. Hence monosyllabic words if not metrically accented, if important, must be accented for emphasis, and the quantity prolonged to compensate for the apparently violated rhythm. The following stanza is arranged as suggested; the grouped words are joined by hyphens; the emphasized words are in italics, and a dash separates the groups or indicates the pauses, and a double dash a poise without a pause:

The-bóy | stood | on-the *búrníng-déck*,
Whence | *áll* | but-hé | had-*fléd*;
The-*fláme* | that-lit-the-battle's-*wréck*,
Shone | round-him | o'er-the-déad.

* Bell's Elocutionary Manual. Subject: "Grammatical Grouping of Words."

Yet | *beautiful* | and-*bright* | he stóod,
As-born | to-*ríle* || the-stórm;
A-creature of-*heroic*-blood,
A-*próud* | though-child-like-form!

3. Give the same modulations and inflections to every word in poetry as in prose. Especially be vigilant to prevent turning up the voice on the last word of the last line of the stanza. This is a common defect in reading hymns. Generally the last line but one of a stanza should be commenced lower than the preceding line, the last word of that line take a rising inflection, and the last word of the last line a falling inflection, but it should not fall in pitch excepting in the last stanza.

The poem of "The Baby," second Reader, is selected as an exercise to illustrate the limits and suggestions given in this article, with all the marks necessary for the guidance of the teacher in the reading, with this exception and condition: that the best guidance will be that given by the reader, realizing to herself the exceeding beauty of the figurative references, and being in full sympathy with their fitness and their truthfulness. The questions in each stanza are simple and literal, but the answers will demand thought and skill to make them intelligible to the pupils. These answers may probably be above the comprehension of young children, but they are suggestive of thought and imagination in the direction of the unseen, the spiritual and the infinite, which cannot fail to cultivate the conceptive and imaginative faculties of childhood. It is an unwise and narrow estimate of those faculties to suit the lessons of the young to the limits of their understanding. They delight to range through the realms of dream land; and these tendencies of child-nature, if wisely directed and strengthened, will prove the best auxiliaries for the poetic culture which refines, and the religious instincts which purify and exalt the mind, as they advance to adult life.

It is recommended that the teacher should first read the poem in the spirit suggested, to the class as a whole. A truthful reading, full of appropriate expression, would be the best introduction to the beautiful allusions in this poem. After the reading by the teacher, each stanza would require explanations and interrogations explanatory of the figurative expressions as far as they could be explained without weakening their spiritual allusions by mere material interpretations; for to materialize what the poet designed to be in the highest sense spiritual, would rob the poem of its choicest characteristics and its purpose.

V. 1, l. 1, read with tender expression; l. 2, expression of wonder and reverence on "everywhere." The word may suggest the material universe; but its best interpretation lies, in its reference to the spiritual, the attributes of wisdom and justice and love of the universal Father, and in whose image Man was made. The student may learn the full force of the expression and its interpretation by reading Wordsworth's splendid poem on "Intimations of Immortality":

"Not | in-entire-*forgetfulness*,
And not | in utter-*nakedness*,
But, trailing-clouds-of-*glóry*, do we cóme,
From-*Góð*, who-is our hómé."

V. 2, l. 1, em. "eyes" with poise and pause. Read l. 2, thus, "Out of the *skíes*." V. 3, l. 1, pause after "where," and combine the remainder without accent to "tear," which em. tremulously; l. 2, read with tremor, expressive of sympathy with human suffering—"Man was born to mourn." V. 5, l. 1, combine without accent to "cheek," which em., but tenderly, and read the simile with warmth; em. "wárm, white, *róse*"; l. 2, read with emotions of wonder and admiration; em. "bétter"; read without accent to "knóws," which emphasize. The thought is prophetic, both in its application to human life and the future possibilities of the Baby. V. 7, l. 1, combine without accent to "éar," which emphasize softly but warmly; l. 2, em. "Góð spóke," solemnly, as if conscious of power exercised with love, combine the remainder to "hear," which em. with swell of voice. V. 8, l. 1, combine to "get," and em. "árms," "hánds," l. 2, em. Love with poise; pause at "itself," and em. "hóoks, bánds." V. 9, l. 1, read the line with admiring warmth; em. "Feét" and "yóu"; strengthen the emotion on "dárlíng things"; l. 2, combine to "box"; combine the remainder, and em. "cherub's," and "wíngs," but lighter. V. 10, l. 1, read slowly,

combining to "cómé," poising on "cómé"; pause at "be" and "just," and em. "yóu"; l. 2, combine to "mè," and em. "thought" and "me." V. 11, l. 1, em. "yóu" strongly; finish slowly and em. "hère." The term "combine" indicates that the combined words are to be read as one oratorical word with poise on the em. word, which is the only one that should take the metrical accent. The syllable "em." means either emphasis or emphasize as the case requires. The reader is reminded that the words selected for expression are open to criticism and alteration. If they lead to investigation and the reader differs from the writer he is satisfied. All he can say is, use your best judgment, read accordingly, but avoid the sing-song regularity of metre.

ANSWER TO CORRESPONDENCE.

W. J.—Exercises, Sect. I. are preparatory, indicating the mode of nasal breathing. Sect. II. gives three steps for rhythmical breathing each increasing in force. In the standing position the exercises are preparatory and the action of gently grasping the waist aids the pupil in the first efforts. In the succeeding exercises, especially those of Sect. II., the arms may hang down and the attention be given chiefly to the *regularity* of rhythmical breathing. The writer acknowledges apparent obscurity in these instructions, due to his anxiety to give much in little. R. L.

Question Drawer.

PLEASE answer through the JOURNAL whether a school board in a village or trustees in a rural section can *compel* children who have passed the "Entrance" to attend the High school if they do not wish to go, and do not ask for any High school studies but are willing to go over the "Entrance" work again?—B. C. H. B.

[Of course, no child can be compelled to attend the High school. The question involved is, we presume, whether the trustees have power to prevent a pupil who has passed the "Entrance" from returning to the Public school to take up again Entrance subjects. The practice of the Department is, we are informed, to regard the matter in ordinary cases as one of purely local concern, and to leave it to be settled by Inspector and trustees.]

1. Is the term at the Normal School likely to be lengthened to one year?
2. If so, when will this change be made?
3. When should application be made for admission to the Normal School?—A SUBSCRIBER.

[[1 and 2) No; there is no present probability of its being lengthened. (3) No application is received earlier than four months before the commencement of the term.]

1. Is Peterborough, in Peterborough county, a city?
2. Will a paper be set on Agriculture at the Entrance Examination in July? Is the "Public School Agriculture" published yet?

[[1) No. (2) A paper will be set if the book can be got ready in time. In that event due notice will no doubt be given.]

WHAT rapids are referred to in the lesson in Third Reader on "The Rapids"? Also kindly give any information about the author, "Charles Sangster."—A. C. N.

[The Rapids of the St. Lawrence. Charles Sangster was born in Kingston, Ont., in 1822. At an early age served as clerk in the Ordnance Department. Afterwards followed the profession of journalism for some time, but in 1867 re-entered Civil Service at Ottawa. He has published two small poetical works, entitled respectively, *The St. Lawrence and the Saguenay*, and *Hesperus and other Poems*. Some of his poems are of considerable merit. They deal largely with the beauties of Canadian scenery.]

WHAT period of time is allowed for a teacher in case of sickness?—J. G.

[Regulation 157 provides that "in case of sickness, certified by a medical man, every teacher shall be entitled to his salary during such sickness,