

A VIGOROUS ARRAIGNMENT Of the American Public School System.

Mrs. Lew Wallace contributes the following article to the Ladies' Home Journal, with reference to the evils of the American public school system:

She says:—Go into any public school and you will see girls as pallid as day lilies, and boys with flat chests and the waxen skin that has been named the school complexion. Every incentive and stimulus is held out; dread of blame, love of praise, prizes, medals, the coveted flourish in the newspapers—the strain never slackens. Watch the long lines filing past, each pupil carrying books—three, four five—to be studied at night in hot rooms by fierce, sight-destroying lights. Time was when spectacles went with age. They are no sign of age now. Many must wear glasses to help eyes worn prematurely old by night work.

Said a thoughtful father, "My children have no child life. They are straining up a grade, talking about examinations. When is their play-time if not now, and what has become of the light-hearted boys? School is never out. Even in the fields the butterfly and the tree-toad are turned into object lessons and the grasshopper is torn to pieces in order to be instructive. When I was a boy, and school let out, we were gay and free. We studied in school-time, and in playtime there was no thought of anything but play."

I do not undervalue education; it is slaying its thousands.

The burden is books. The tasks imposed on the young are fearful. The effort seems to be to make text-books as difficult and complicated as possible, instead of smoothing the hill so high and hard to climb.

Said a mother, "Two and two are what?"

The boy hesitated.

"Surely you know that two and two make four."

"Yes, mamma; but I was trying to remember the process."

"Process, indeed!"

A child nine years is required to define and understand such words as these: apocrysis, apocope, paragon, paraleipsis, diocrosis, synocrosis, tmesis. There are famous speakers and writers who never saw them.

Let the gentle reader be as ignorant as the writer, I mention that these, and more of the same sort, may be found in many modern English grammars.

One day Mary was bending over a table writing words on both sides of a straight line, like multiplied numerators and denominators.

"What are you at now?" asked grandma.

Mary answered with pride, "I am diagraming."

"In the name of sense, what's diagraming?"

"It's mental discipline, Miss Gram says. I have a fine mind that needs developing. Look here, grandma, now this is correct placing of elements. 'Fourscore' and 'seven' are joined by the word 'and,' a subordinate collective copulative conjunction. It modifies 'years,' the attribute of the proposition. 'Age' is a model adverb of past time. The root word of the first clause is—"

"Why, that's Lincoln's speech at Gettysburg. I keep it in my work-basket and know it by heart."

"Indeed! Well, 'Our' is a simple personal—"

"That's enough. If President Lincoln had been brought up on such stuff that speech would never have been written. He called a noun a noun, and was done with it."

One day Mary came home at noon too sick to eat dinner. What had happened to the darling? She had seen a cat dissected in class.

Are our daughters being trained for surgeons?

Other noons she was required to find who was the author of "I sat by its cradle, I followed its hearse," and what caused the fall of the feudal system, and bring back the answers for afternoon session. She was too hurried to eat anything but a banana while making a dive at the reference books, and said, "I only remember these answers a few days. There's so much more coming on all the time." Of course by far the greater portion must be forgotten as the waves of yesterday.

The whole family go and laugh themselves to death at the "Milk White Flag," while Mary stays in to do her problems, her head bound with a wet cloth. Having no turn for mathematics, she will never get any sense out of it. Naturally, she hates the hypothesis (if that's the name), and its kindred torments are foreign to her as monkey talk. With red eyelids and nervous fingers she ciphers whole evenings over partial payments—suns not ten men could do

and for which she can never have need.

"Mental discipline." Not any more than a Chinese puzzle; merely so much rubbish under the attic. The mathematics superstition is strong in the land we love to call our own; children of thirteen are in algebra.

Undertake the tasks laid on girls in their teens for one year and then write me how you like the system. We need no physician to tell us that the number of nervous diseases on the increase is appalling. Even paralysis has crept in on the young; a leading physician in our State had three new cases in 1896. There is too much of everything except what is contained in Judge Baldwin's admirable answer to the question, "Should manners be taught in our public schools?" Four, or at the utmost five hours are a full day's study if one is to have health in this exhaustive climate. Under our forcing system the time demanded is nearly ten hours. Foreign children may study harder, but they do not come of fathers consumed by ambition, and mothers trying to do the impossible.

The girls break first because of greater capacity for suffering in nerves alive and quivering that with boys are insensible as telegraph wires. Besides, girls are more tractable, and take to music, embroidery and painting, while boys play ball. In sanitariums, rest cures, water cures and other refuges, forlorn wrecks of women lie on beds of pain, swallowing cod-liver oil, malted milk and beguiling "foods" and drugs in order to build up. But there are no foundations to build upon.

There are limits to geography; since literature has possessed the public mind there are no boundary lines. To be sure it is a fine thing to read Browning at sight and know what Carlyle means by a "hellqueller," but these delights may be reserved for maturer intellects; something might be left undone in the schools. A pupil must read "Paradise Lost" and write and essay on the poem within six days, a composition for scholars and that few scholars do read. I learn with pain that Dante has been added to the course in some states. The dead cat lasted only a day; Dante goes through a whole term. Let the great poets come in later years, royal guests, not taskmasters appointed to inflict us with burdens. Be sure if your children want Milton they will find him, and oh, do not make a study of "Child Harold."

"Back of all, and harder than unending rules, is the merciless ambition of parents. American children must do, be and have everything. Propose to cut down, drop the least congenial study, and there is an outcry—"Why, then Mary could not get her diploma!" What will she do with it if she does get it? Lay it away in a forgotten top drawer, or frame and hang it in the guest chamber—a costly document bought with a great price.

Said a tender mother to me: "The air of the school room is so foul that my boys' heads smell of it."

"And you continue to send them?"

"Oh, yes, you know they must pass."

They are passing.

The mother of a girl with lips colorless as her forehead, declared: "I have a high standard of education for Julia."

"But health, if she leaves that in the text-books, though she speak with the tongues of men and of angels, it profiteth nothing."

"I mean," determinedly, "for her to have advantages, and when she gets her diploma she can rest."

So she sums along till she can multiply three figures by three figures in her head, day and night thinking and thinking. One Sunday afternoon, when even the day laborer was having his leisurely stroll, I asked why she was not out with the rest of the family. She was at home writing an essay on Gray's Elegy.

"Oh, it's no trouble for her to do it. I don't see how she writes so easily. This is her last year; she has seven studies; then comes the finishing school at New Haven."

"Doesn't her head ache?"

"Sometimes she talks in her sleep" (again the proud look); it's Latin I think."

She was already in the finishing school, and what she now says in her sleep we shall not know till we learn the language of the dead.

That is not the only house where there is a drawer scented with tuberoso and heliotrope, and opening it is like opening the grave.

Easy for her to have seven studies under seven different teachers! Try it, yourself!

Said one of my neighbors, "Here

are two diplomas; they represent my two daughters educated to death." Death by freezing is easier. One of the most foolish sights I have ever seen was a feeble, country girl who expected to earn a living, she hardly knew how, puzzling over Cicero's orations.

Latin is part of the treadmill stairs all must climb. Well has it been said of the Romans that had they been obliged to learn their own language they never would have been able to conquer the world. The dull girl pulls through grades high and low, and when the time comes to take a teething baby through dog days and nights how goes the battle? Down with nervous prostration, she would give Euclid, Cicero, even the seventh book of Thucydides, for a day's release from the pangs of neuralgia. Baby is predestined, one of the never-sleeping sort, doomed to nerves tense as fiddle strings.

To get through in a given time the rate of speed is like the French woman's who, at dinner, whispered to the philosopher, "Now, while the plates are changing, be quick and tell me the history of the world."

I knew one type of a class. She mastered various sciences and languages, had seven years of music, and in mathematics went so far as to carry the surveyor's chain. She started in evanescent beauty, rose bloom and snow, and faded as certain sea shells lose their color lying in the sun. The last time I saw her she said with angelic patience, "My dear children are wakeful at night and I suffer a good deal." She dropped without complaint, and one day the black horses came to the door and bore away the young mother to the city of the silent.

There is a school, not a thousand miles away from Indianapolis, where

the n l l s t man

That ever lived in the tide of times"

had what would now be called a meagre education, cared nothing for books, and was without a library. It is doubtful if any one of our chiefs walked through the valley of the Shadow of Dante while a schoolboy.

Few are born great, and if greatness is to be achieved it will not be by piling books at the top of one's head till the brains cannot move.

President Lincoln taught us that if a man loves learning he will have it though he live in a wilderness.

In conclusion Mrs. Lew Wallace pleads for a simpler system of education."

TALKS TO BOYS AND GIRLS.

WHEN MOTHER LOOKS.

I remember such a lot of things That happened long ago, When me an' Jim was six years old— An' now we're ten or so.

But those I remember best— The ones I most can see— Are the things that used to happen When mother looked at me.

One time in Church, when me an' Jim Was sneekin' out loud— 'The minister was prayin' an' The people's heads was bowed— We had the biggest kind of joke About a humblabee,

But things got quiet rather quick When mother looked at me.

And then there's some times when I think I've had such lots of fun

Agoin' in a swimmin' with the boys Down there by Jones' run.

But when I get back home again— Just 'bout in time for tea— There's a kind of diffeent feeling When mother looks at me.

That time when I was awful sick, An' the doctor shook his head.

An' every time pa come around His eyes was wet an' red; I member her hands on my face, How soft they used to be— Somehow the pain seemed easier, When mother looked at me.

It's funny how it makes you feel— I ain't afraid of her.

She's about the nicest person You'd find most anywhere; But the queerest sort of feeling, As queer as queer can be, Makes everything seem different When mother looks at me.

THE BLESSING AT MEALS.

It is to be regretted that the sterling old Catholic custom of blessing and thanksgiving at meals, like many other Catholic customs, is allowed to fall into disuse, either through indifference or out of deference to anti-Catholic surroundings. Although there is no obligation to pray before and after meals, it is such a beautiful and Christian practice that boys and girls should acquire it from their very early years. Parents ought to insist that their children follow it from the start, and not allow them to partake of the bounty of God like the beasts of the field that have no understanding. There may occasionally be times and places when we may omit the external ceremony, but at home there is never any excuse for neglecting it.

READING.

There are very few young folks who have not some time, however little, for reading; and what time they have may as well be spent in reading the works of good standard writers as those of authors who are not worthy of the name.

People who are accustomed to read trashy and sensational novels and "yellow publications," have no taste

for any other kind of literature. This is indeed deplorable, because there is nothing good or useful in this kind of reading; as soon as it is read, it passes from the mind, but the effect remains. It inflames the imagination, gives false views of life, and most pernicious mental habits are formed.

Such reading has been compared to a sugar-coated pill that tastes sweet, but which leaves a bitter taste in the mouth. Remember that the habit of reading and thinking formed in early years, will follow you through life; and therefore all should be very careful in selecting their reading matter.

The boys and girls of our city should patronize the Montreal Catholic Free Library, situated in the basement of the Jesuit's Church, Henry street, where books can be had to suit everybody. The works of the foremost Catholic juvenile writers can there be obtained; and those that can, should take advantage of the opportunities there presented, to form and cultivate a taste for sound and healthy literature.

HOW TONY GOT EVEN.

The "American Woman" tells the story of a boy's soul-bravery and how, true to the grandest principle of life, he conquered his first natural impulse to "get even."

I'll pay him off! I'll pay him off first chance I get, if 'tisn't till I'm old as Methusalem, now!"

Tony's two brown fists came together with a thump. His eyes flashed and his face was like a flame. Mamma looked up, surprised and grieved at the outburst, but she didn't say a word; she only waited for what would come next.

"I will!" cried Tony. "I'll have to, mamma! He's the worst boy that ever lived! He's—he's—I'd like to pound him all black and blue, so!"

Whack! came his fists together again, poor Tony; and the fire in his eyes was all at once put out by tears. Mamma spoke then.

"Tell mother all about it," said she.

And Tony sat down on a little cricket at mamma's feet, and laid his head against mamma's knee, and told; which was just what he wanted to do.

"He's kept plaguing me ever since I began to go to school, mamma, Johnny Spratt has, and he's the biggest too. I wouldn't plague a boy littler than I was, would you, mamma?"

"No, dear, I don't think I would."

"But he does, and calls names, too," Tony went on, beginning to grow rosy again. He calls me "Tony George" because I always lift my hat to old aunt, Dismore—and that's right, isn't it, mamma?" as he thought he saw a little twinkle in mamma's eye.

"Quite right, Tony," she answered, quietly.

"Cause it pleases her so much, you know. And sometimes I carry her basket for her a ways. And he makes fun. And this morning—" Tony's

breath came fast and he doubled his fists—"this morning I was the least bit late to school, and when I went in they all commenced to laugh, easy, of course, so Mr. Blake wouldn't care and look at the blackboard. And I looked, too; and there was a picture of a boy lifting a hat bigger'n he was, and bowing real low—an awful looking boy, mamma, and 'Tony George' was right under it. I know who made it quick enough, and my face got hot as fire; and just then Mr. Blake saw it, too, and he said 'John, rub that thing out!' cross as anything. He knew who made it, too, you see. Mamma, if I was big enough I'd—I'd thrash him all to pieces. I'd just like to pay him off so he'd stay paid one while, mamma!"

Mamma didn't even smile. She felt that this was a serious matter.

"I don't blame you a bit," she said, soberly. "I think I would want to pay him off if I were you. I think, dear, I would kill him."

Tony jumped from his cricket, he was so astonished.

"Why, mamma Walters!" he cried. "Why—mamma—Walters!"

Mamma smiled then—she couldn't help it. But she was quite in earnest.

"It would be a great deal better than thrashing him all to pieces, Tony," she said; and Tony hung his head and blushed. "Suppose you try it."

"I don't know how," said Tony.

"I think you can guess, dear. And now we won't say another word about it for a week."

"I s'pose," said Tony, slowly, with his face puckered into a dozen wrinkles over this new idea, "I s'pose mamma, you mean the way that old Quaker man did that grandpa used to tell about. But I can't be kind to Johnny Spratt, mamma—how can I after the way he has acted? Sides, I wouldn't have any chance."

"Make one," said mamma. "Now—no more for a week, my son, and then—"

Tony knew what that meant. It meant that at the end of the week he would be expected to tell mamma just how much he had done towards killing Johnny Spratt with kindness.

"I'm 'fraid it won't be much," he thought, with a little discontented pucker between his eyes. "It'll be pretty hard, I s'pose."

And so it was. Why, it did seem as if Johnny Spratt grew worse every day. Tony had to bite his tongue hard a good many times to keep from telling tales out of school about him.

And as for being kind to him—that seemed quite out of the question, though Tony honestly did his best and didn't get angry more times than he could help.

At the end of the week his birthday was coming, and Washington's; and the night before, he rushed home from school all out of breath with his hurry and delight.

"O mamma!" he cried, eagerly. We're going to have the best time, to-morrow! We're all—all of our class, you know—going to put in 25 cents apiece and hire Mr. Baker's great big cutter, and Mr. Blake's going to take us to—some kind of a lake that the last of it's 'gentic,' and his sister lives right close side of it, and we're going to skate, and fire at a mark, with just arrows, you know, mamma, and eat dinner at his sister's house. And we've got to meet at the schoolhouse real early, and—won't it be grand, mamma?"

Mamma smiled, and kissed both glowing cheeks; for though Tony was a good deal more than half past nine, as he would have told you, he hadn't grown away from his mother's kisses, yet.

"I hope you will have a very nice time," she said.

She said it again, next morning, when she had helped him into his ulster, and tied his muffler carefully, and settled his fur cap on his brown head.

"And now, Tony," she said, looking down into his clear brown eyes, "I want you to remember whose birthday this is—and all about it, dear."

"Yes'm, I'll try," said Tony. And then he darted off to join the merry little crowd at the schoolhouse.

Johnny Spratt was there, too, but somehow he didn't look so merry as the rest. His eyes looked almost as though he had been crying.

But before Tony had time to wonder much about this, Mr. Baker's big, four-seated cutter was at the door, the bells jingling and the horses breathing out little puffs of steam or the clear frosty air. Then what a scramble there was! It didn't seem longer than a minute before all of the laughing, merry company had piled in, and were tucking the robes around themselves.

Not quite all. There was one lonely little figure left on the platform.

"Come Johnny!" called Mr. Blake, kindly.

But Johnny Spratt shook his head and looked down at his feet. There

were tears in his eyes, and he didn't want to cry before them all—a great big boy, almost eleven years old!

"I—I ain't going," he said. "I only came to see you off. I ain't got no twenty-five cents."

"There was a stir in Tony Walters' heart just then, and he felt a funny little warm rush all over him. He thought of mamma—he remembered whose birthday it was. His cheeks grew cherry-red and his eyes grew misty. In a flash he was out of the cutter, pressing his silver quarter into Johnny Spratt's hand.

"Here, Johnny, take this," he cried. "You—you want to go more'n I do."

"Poor Johnny Spratt! He looked at Tony and then at the sleigh-load of boys, and then Tony again, and his face turned very red.

"I—I'd look pretty," he said, "at taking your money after I've—O Tony Walters! I won't!"

But the more he wouldn't, the more Tony insisted.

"Because it's my birthday as well as George Washington's, you know," he said, with a little laugh; "and I'd 'most as lieves stay to home with my mother. Come Johnny!"

And then Mr. Blake, who understood all about it, said, "Come, Johnny, jump in," and obeyed, no more to crying now than he had been before.

But all at once there came a voice from the driver's seat.

"Crowd in yourself, little chap," it said, "I don't believe you'll weigh half of twenty-five cents' worth. All aboard! Off we go!"

And off Tony went with the rest—if he hadn't I think I couldn't have told the story with half so good grace. And he never was so happy, and never had so good a time in all his life before as he had on that day. It was a good time all round, and as for Johnny Spratt—

"Why, mamma," cried Tony, when he told his mother the story of the day's fun. "I b'lieve he's going to be one of the best boys you ever saw—one of the very best ones!"—T. W.

A NEW CATHOLIC WEEKLY.

The "New Era" is the name of a new publication devoted to the interests of Catholics, and issued simultaneously in London and Paris. It is a weekly one and in fact takes on rather the habitments of a magazine with a distinctive object in view, rather than the mere caterer of news for the Catholic world. The work done in the first issue is excellent.

To bear pain for the sake of bearing it has in it no moral quality at all; but to bear it rather than surrender truth, or in order to save another, is positive enjoyment, as well as exulting the soul.

The world is very human, not a bit given to adopting virtues for the sake of those who merely bewain its vices, and we are most effective when we are most calmly in possession of our senses.—Woodrow Wilson.

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