

The Idea of Unity in Literature as a Basis of Rational Teaching.

THAT there has been in recent years considerable improvement in the teaching of literature in our schools, will be readily admitted by all who are competent to form an intelligent opinion upon the subject. The ethical and intellectual culture of which literature may be made the most effective instrument, is now an important factor in the teacher's purpose. Greater attention is paid to the author and less to the annotator. Irrelevant matter is more carefully excluded, and facts but remotely related to the literature as literature are held in due subordination. Mere verbal interpretations and barren distinctions of rhetorical forms are no longer the chief thing. Grammatical and philological ideas when admitted at all, are admitted, not as an end, but as a means for the better illustration and more thorough mastery of thought, sentiment and expression. Our best teachers now present the lesson in literature with a clearer view of both logical and psychological laws; and especially with an inspiration—the happy outcome of intelligently controlled enthusiasm—that creates a love of literature; a love which alone qualifies the student to perceive the beauty and the truth of it, and makes for that higher culture which is the flower and fruit of literary studies.

But, though the present days are better than the former, something yet remains to be done to achieve the best possible results from the study of literature. The application of rational principles can be made more thorough and more general. Instead of high excellence being the distinguishing feature of a few schools, it should become the common characteristic of all. This is, perhaps, a high ideal; it is not an unattainable one. But to reach the high ideal we must be con-

scious of the short-comings of the actual. The recognition of defects is the first condition of further progress. It may be said, then, that some of the faults in literature teaching which are still too common, and for which, by the way, our teachers are not wholly responsible, are due to want of full appreciation of the following things:—(1) The Value of Psychology as the basis of rational method in literature as in every other department of the curriculum; (2) the Value of Literature as an instrument of Intellectual Development; (3) its Value as a means of Ethical and Aesthetic Culture; (4) the High Function of Oral Reading in the Study of Literature; and (5) the Idea of Unity in Literature as the basis of rational method.

To the last point some attention will now be given, the others being left for discussion at some future time.

In every piece of prose composition worthy to be called literature, there is an orderly movement of ideas towards a definite end. In high-class literature, the product of a strong and cultured mind working under a clear and ever-present conception of its purpose, this movement of ideas seems to be spontaneous—a self-movement of constantly increasing clearness, unity and force.

This logical sequence of ideas is determined by the discriminating and unifying activity of the intellect. From the mass of materials supplied by association, the mind selects only those ideas and groups of ideas that bear most directly on the theme and the central thought. The entire discourse is therefore, a series of related thoughts—of related groups of thoughts and related thoughts within the groups. These are the unities of composition. The cardinal divisions of the theme are related groups of thoughts—larger unities constituting the unity of composition. The subdivisions are, in turn, related groups of thoughts—smaller unities constituting the larger unities, and so on, down to the unity of the single