

CORRESPONDENCE.

For the Journal of Education.

SCHOOL BOOKS.

PAST AND PRESENT.

A FEW years ago it was said the school books used in this Province were a disgrace to the community. If we examine we may find some reasons for this statement of a truth, and then flatter ourselves that *vous changez tout cela*.

In the first place the school books used were commonly too old. Before educational books can attain a fair circulation, their value is in a great measure passed. In the second place, the books used were too often written on wrong principles, and on a bad plan. It is an invidious task to adduce instances, but it is to be feared that they will come before us only too plentifully in our detailed enumeration.

There are two difficulties therefore to be overcome by those who would improve elementary instruction. First, to banish incorrect, inefficient and unsuitable works; and, secondly to introduce those which may answer the proposed end. On the principle of overcoming evil by good, a principle of steady and universal use in education, the first object can only be attained by means of the second. We readily grant that a skilful workman may work in spite of bad tools, but we maintain also that the higher his skill, the more reluctant will he feel to use bad tools. His desire will be to bring his implements to as high a degree of perfection as possible, in order that he may work with every possible advantage. A careless workman, one whose thought is more upon *getting through* his employment, than upon *doing it* to the best of his powers, will not give himself much concern on the subject.

In scientific works, the writers of school books now ignored, began at the wrong end; they pre-supposed knowledge in a learner, forgetful that all beginners are children with regard to the science in which they are pupils. It is most difficult to find even now a scientific work *strictly* elementary. The last step in a science is classification; yet it is with classification that too many of our teaching treatises begin. Even in so common a study as English grammar, the book most in vogue among us, commences with the information that "English grammar is divided into four parts, viz: Orthography, Etymology, Syntax, and Prosody." What, we ask, in the name of ignorant wonder, are poor, stupid children to comprehend from these learned and sonorous words? Literally and figuratively, it is only teaching them to repeat so much Greek. In speaking of our newly adopted works we shall endeavour to draw a favourable contrast.

Some treatises were broken up into question and answer, and then under the name of Catechisms were placed in the hands of the gaping and wondering little learners. Let any one really acquainted with the principles of education attempt to give instruction in any art, science, or useful branch of knowledge, by means of such catechisms, and he will soon find that he will be obliged either to give up the attempt, or to throw aside the book. The very plan is a libel upon the common sense of mankind. As we look down the long list, and observe Algebra, Botany, Conchology, Dynamics, Entomology, &c., all alphabetically arranged through every branch of human learning as far as Zoology, we are forcibly reminded of the French Marchioness, who, wishing her son to have a "teinture" of every thing, was reminded by a learned Abbe, to whom she intended to entrust his education, that it would be better to send for a "teinturier," in order to enact the part of tutor.

Another great evil of our school books was that words were taught, but things were not explained, and we are not so sure that such a state of things is yet obsolete. Knowledge in the present day is too superficial, and seems becoming continually more so. We would have educational treatises elementary, but we would not have them superficial; let the pupil understand well, as far as he goes, and then let him be prepared for making further advances. Our complaint of want of simplicity is closely connected with that which we are now making; in order to build high, we must lay the foundation deep, but many of the structures around us are no better than heaps of stones piled together without order, and which though they appear a tolerable mass,

will be dispersed silently and for ever by the first heavy blast or pelting shower. We have seen advertisements of other publications bearing such titles as "History made easy," "French in three months without a master, &c." Now, supposing for one moment that it were possible, it would not be desirable. We remember to have read something to the following effect: "To throw a veil of mystery over that which in itself is plain and obvious is decidedly foolish if not culpable; but to attempt to make all knowledge popular is not only foolish but injurious, it is better that the frivolous should remain in ignorance, than that the thinking and inquisitive should be asked to acquire wisdom in a few weeks by easy lessons and without masters." Some recommend that in early life there should be a certain familiarity with scientific terms. With all due respect we think that it is the sure way to make children smatterers for life. It is often said that there are persons who make the same use of books as Goldsmith's unfortunate beau did of lords; they learn their titles, and then boast of their acquaintance. Children will be ready enough to fancy themselves possessed of some knowledge of Botany, Chemistry, or what you will, because they have parrot-like, learned some of the terms. Better, a thousand times better that they should remain in ignorance of them through life, than that they should be encouraged to make a mistake so egregious. Another evil of this smattering is that if these sciences are ever hereafter to be really studied, the keenness of the appetite is taken off by the mistimed familiarity in childhood. The bloom is removed from the plum, the down from the peach, the perfume from the rose, and what remains? And, besides, if the false idea be once given that abstruse or extensive studies can be mastered in a few easy lessons without a master, and this in childhood, there will be little hope, in future years, that the mind will ever be aroused to that state of vigorous action, necessary for their successful prosecution. "*C'est une belle chose que de savoir quelque chose*" said poor Mons. Jourdain, and there is a pathos and simplicity in this exclamation which almost reconcile us to Mons. Jourdain. It is a good thing to know something, thoroughly and satisfactorily; but we are of opinion that when Jack is good at all trades, he is master of none. To return to our *moutons*, i. e., our school books. Both geography and history are studied far too much as mere sciences of names, though our excellent school history by Dr. Collier, and our geography by "Calkin" should be turned to better account, with more favourable results.

We might pursue the examination through most of the old school books to an almost indefinite extent, but this is enough. The skill of a teacher may soon be known by his choice of instruments—books. "I do not think that Queen Elizabeth was so great a sovereign," said one of her feeblest successors, "but she chose wise ministers," "and when Sir," was the scathing reply, "was it ever known that a fool did so?" HALIFAX.

TRUE BEAUTY.

W. N. RUTLEDGE.

WHERE is true beauty found and what is it? Those around us say, "See! how beautiful." We look and see the little leaf or blade of grass moving with life and pointing to heaven. We see the tulip as it seems to bow its head in humility, and the rose and the honey-suckle as they give their sweet perfume to the air. We see the snow-capped mountain, the little green vale, the broad rolling prairie (God's flower garden,) and the cool shady grove (God's temple). We see the rich pearl, the sparkling diamond, the silvery crescent moon, "queen of night," with her court of twinkling stars. We see the blue dome of heaven, the wave-like clouds, the rosy-fingered Aurora, "daughter of the dawn," and the reflected rays of a setting sun. We see the dew drop as it nourishes the flower, the little brook as it comes from the mountain murmuring a song of love, the cataract as it dashes madly over the rocks, and the broad blue ocean as its waves leap towards heaven. We see the proud eagle as it makes its circle in the heavens, and the swift horses as they contest in the race. We see the steamers and the steam engines as they move with power and ease. We see in the galleries of art the works of painters and sculptors.