

### Supplementary Reading in the Public Schools.

Read before the New Brunswick Teachers' Institute by Edward Manning, M. A.

The highest aim of the school, as of the church, is the building up of character. And as every one is moulded to a large extent by what he reads, the question of what literature we should set before our pupils surely becomes of the very gravest importance. At first sight there may seem to be little need for anxiety on the subject, for we all know that the present is an age of reading. The twenty cent novel, nay the ten or five cent novelette, is commoner than the Canada thistle; the press is everywhere, and deals with everything and everybody; and the voice of the book agent is heard in the land. As the spread of the language is marvellous—nearly ten fold in the last century, I believe—so also the increase in its literature is commensurate, and its horizon is now world wide. One day a star appears in it above the Golden Gate; another, the next day, glitters beyond the Indus; a third blazes up suddenly beneath the Southern Cross at Melbourne; a fourth is now in occultation in far Samoa, and a fifth has just emerged from it in strange Japan. And easy-going optimism says, "Oh! turn the young mind out to browse at will, and it will all come right." But a close view reveals reason for demur and doubt. Are the pretty row of show volumes in the ordinary town home proof of abundance of good reading, or the gaudily covered magazines, often as rich in illustrations as poor in real food for thought? or again, the one poor shelf in the farmhouse, half taken up by consolidated statutes, garden seeds, and old almanacs? And the doubt grows more serious yet, when one meets such a fact as the recent destruction of two tons of obscene matter in New York the other day by the Society for the Suppression of Vice, and then wonders what proportion this immense mass bears to that which has escaped detection, and is doing its devilish work. Even of a reputable newspaper, what fraction is really fit for the eye of the young? Clearly the tares are springing up as of old among the wheat, and altogether the lustier growth of the two. And so it behooves us as teachers to occupy the soil betimes with good seed and plenty of it, and so to leave as little room as may be for the crop of noxious weeds ever ready to choke it. Not content with constant effort to have the very best text-books, the cry is now for more of extra reading, for courses in English literature, for the use in schools and colleges of the best classics of the mother tongue. And in our own little corner of this vast domain, the question is raised—"How far is a supplementary course of read-

ing advisable and practical in our schools, and what shall it be?"

Now, where the books are provided by the trustees, as is the case sometimes in Britain and the United States, supplementary readers can of course be added as seems best. But the adoption of this plan by us would involve parents in extra expense, which would, in all likelihood, prove a fatal objection. It is already urged that we have too many cumbersome and expensive text-books. How then can the matter be managed in our primary and advanced grades?

As to the first of these, say up to Grade 3, the answer is plain. Children at this stage could make but little use of books if they had them. Any supplementary reading here then must be that given by the teacher, one of whose most essential accomplishments is to be a thoroughly good, clear, sympathetic reader—an accomplishment, by the bye, much rarer than is commonly thought to be the case. Such a teacher, however, can hold the attention of the little ones rapt with the impressive delivery or recital of many a simple apologue or lyric—sometimes reaching back in its origin to the childhood of the race, and instinct with the very spirit of childhood, simple enough may be in its wording, but vindicating by its very age its claim to live on. A learned Hindoo clergyman who has collected some of the folk lore of Bengal says in his introduction that "They have been handed down verbatim by Bengali mothers for a hundred generations." What seeds of love, of thought, of wisdom may be sowed in the virgin soil of little minds by these easy means? And even beyond these grades, the teacher may still use this expedient occasionally, in common with others, though to a less extent.

One of these others, say in Grades 4 to 6, is to allow the pupil to bring to school any book which has interested him. If judged suitable, the pupil after reading a passage to the teacher privately, to secure that it be well presented, may then read a piece aloud to the class. If the pupil is naturally a good reader as may happen at this stage, this exercise would fill a useful place in the miscellaneous work on Friday afternoons. It is also well for the others now and then, to listen to one of their own number, without having the passage before their eyes in their own text books.

In Grades 7 and 8 the teacher may suggest to the scholar extra reading from the stock at home, or procurable from the Sunday-school or Public Library; as good works on travel and adventure, information on common things, or science presented in easy and intelligible form, or natural history, or on sound fiction and poetry. A bright boy or girl at this stage of progress (say from 11 to 13) would be only too