

Special Papers.

THE PENCIL IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOL.

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For our present purpose, the term "pencil" may be regarded as synonymous with any means employed in teaching the art of drawing in our Public Schools, as we endeavor briefly to treat of the bearings of the subject on the work of both pupil and teacher.

It is a question whether any subject in the course is less taught, or less effectively taught, than drawing. Teachers do not manifest that energy, enthusiasm, and indefatigability which, as a general rule, characterize their work in many of the other branches. And why is it thus?

Drawing, as an art, presents to us as pure, high, and noble ideals as either of the kindred studies, music or literature. The world honors the artist, as it does the musician, the hero, the philosopher, the statesman, or the poet. In national life, the proficiency in art denotes the height of national prosperity and civilization; in the home it points to domestic felicity.

Drawing is to the observation, memory, and imagination, what vocal expression is; the latter assumes the form of a word-picture, the former a color-picture, both clearly and easily presentable to the mind, the only difference being in the means of conveyance. The pen or pencil writes thoughts; the pen, pencil, or brush, as the case may be, embodies them in pictorial form. Of the two ways of giving expression to a thought or image, the latter is more easily comprehended; for the sense of sight is more easily, because more directly, appealed to.

As to the uses of drawing, they are without number. But, generally speaking, the ability to draw enables one to give to the world around him what he has seen or thought, of which otherwise he only would be the selfish possessor. A word-picture or even a vivid description from the pen of the most accurate observer would prove inadequate to satisfy our thirst for sight. The illustration must supplement the description, else no definite conception is attained. It is by this means only that we acquire some of the most useful information we possess. We know what the mammoth or the ancient Egyptian looked like; we can scan the features of Robert Bruce, of William Pitt, of George Washington, or of Hon. W. E. Gladstone, or we can see in miniature what appearance Niagara's thundering cataract presents.

Next in educational value to the living reality is a picture of it. A South American mechanic recently constructed a serviceable safety bicycle with a picture as his only guide. This proves how decidedly superior it was to a letter-press description, for practical purposes.

One of life's privileges is to gaze on such a masterpiece as Raphael's St. Cecilia. We can realize that the soul of the old master has been infused into a creation of transcendent splendor and purity of delineation, and a more absorbing interest only quickens our latent imagination, making us fancy that in modulated distant chorus we hear the symphonies of the attendant heavenly host.

Such is the potency of illustration, and such its inspiration, which may be merely momentary; nevertheless, by reason of its intensity, its influence is permanent, preaching us an impressive sermon, though, like the greatest of all forces, it is silent.

Taking a utilitarian view of the subject, we are led to consider the commercial value of drawing, for in this practical age nothing commends itself to the world so well as that which may be readily converted into current coin. There is to-day, an ever-increasing demand for illustrators on newspaper and magazine work, and there is, perhaps, no more remunerative employment for young men, and young women, too, who are competent for such positions. Every newspaper of any importance in Canada to-day has its staff artists, so that it is no longer necessary for them to adopt a patent medicine cut for Mrs. Langtry one day, and the same for Queen Lil, of Honolulu, the next. Probably every one of these staff artists first manifested his inclination to draw in the Public Schools. DuMaurier's Trilby would not have been so widely read and admired had it not been that the author immortalized his heroine, not only by his story,

but by his pictures of her—her faultless feet included. Nor is he the only eminent writer who enhanced the value of his writing by apt illustration, for Thackeray contributed accompanying cuts of his ideal characters. Had Shakespeare done likewise, we would not need to speculate so much on the personal appearance of Macbeth, Hamlet, or Richard III.

Of all special departments of drawing, varying in difficulty, I have selected object-drawing as the basis of further observations, because it is most useful, most rational, and because it comprises all the others. Let us look at what some of the most distinguished educational reformers say with regard to the subject.

Jacotot maintained that a teacher could teach that which he did not know, and the underlying root of this paradoxical principle, if applied at all, may be applied to drawing. A teacher may not be able to draw himself—a condition attributable only to early neglect of his powers—yet he can by passing comment cause his pupils to attain a measure of skill simply by stirring up their enthusiasm; and this is the highest type of teaching, in that, far from making the pupil a passive recipient of another's ideas, it makes him a zealous worker and active searcher after truth in his own behalf. It is much easier in our day to inculcate a love for the art than it was in the time of our progenitors, for the reason that artistic environment is more accessible.

Rousseau says: "Children, who are great imitators, all try to draw. I should wish my 'Emile' to cultivate this art, not exactly for the art itself, but to make his eye correct and his hand supple." Then mark the contrast between the natural method and that of the authorities in nearly all the art schools, even of our present day. He further states: "Emile is always to draw from the *object*; my intention is not so much that he should get to *imitate* the objects, as to *know* them."

We see that Rousseau strikes the keynote of the proper method in drawing, contending that all valuable knowledge in this subject, as in all others, must, in the earlier stages, be conveyed to the understanding through the senses, in close communion with nature, without compelling the pupil to become an imitator of imitators.

Furthermore, Pestalozzi declares that "a person who is in the habit of drawing, especially from nature, will easily perceive many circumstances which are commonly overlooked, and will form a more correct impression even of such objects as he does not stop to examine minutely, than one who has never been taught to look upon what he sees with an intention of reproducing a likeness of it.

The attention to the exact shape of the whole, and the proportion of the parts which is requisite for the taking of an adequate sketch, is converted into a habit, and becomes productive both of instruction and amusement." If for no other reason than for producing in our pupils the habit of accurate observation, or for making them more devoted to nature and natural history, I think we should pay a due share of attention to the subject.

The sixteenth century brought us the Renaissance in arts and letters, but I think the nineteenth is ringing in the Renaissance of Public School drawing. As an indication of this, we have only to look at our present Public School drawing books, and compare them with those of ten years ago. We must all admit their superiority over the preceding ones, because they are more in accord with the natural method, for the reason that a more prominent place is given to object-drawing.

Now, object-drawing includes memory-drawing, or it is comparatively useless, inasmuch as a person who cannot remember cannot draw objects. Of course, the figures in the rudimentary stages are all composed of straight lines and simple curves.

In order to determine whether a pupil should spend the greater part of his time at school in learning to draw freehand, straight lines and circles, let us look to an infallible guide in nature's forms around us. Outside of the horizon and certain minute crystalline forms, one cannot find a single straight line in nature. Upon this fact I base the assumption that all straight lines should be drawn with rulers, and all circles with compasses. Such work is necessary in manual training for the arts of mechanical and industrial designing, but in the former a drawing is of no value unless it possess clearness, and in the latter its value is proportionate only to its truth to the harmony and symmetry of nature. The elementary

work in the course is mechanical, but as the classes progress we find they are introduced gradually to object-work, first in mere outline, then shaded, and then in perspective grouping. But all this work assumes the form of slavish copying from printed forms. Granting that the cuts in the drawing books are accurate and true to nature, a pupil receives a training in examination and reproduction of detail that is valuable if supplemented by work from the object or from memory. Yet it is surprising that pupils who are expert copyists often fail to portray even the most prominent features of objects set before them. If judiciously controlled, by selecting for him suitable objects graded in difficulty, the pupils efforts lead him to solve by intuition the problems of perspective and of light and shade. Such theories are hard to expound as rules, but are much simpler when unconsciously induced by observation, properly concentrated and directed. The teacher's part in the work is to lead the pupils to notice discrepancies in their work, and, after they have had a sufficient number of examples in the concrete, to enunciate a few general rules in perspective or shading, as the case may be. But copying is only intended as a means to an end, and we are not to mistake the means for the end in view, which is originality. Copying leads the pupil to observe closely general contour, proportion, and the exact features of the copy, but he seems to lack that mental satisfaction that is afforded by original research, and economizes the precious time of both teacher and pupil.

With all deference due to the older and more learned heads, I firmly and conscientiously believe that every man, woman, and child, who is not physically incapacitated, can draw; just as every man, woman, and child can sing; nevertheless, the character of their drawing may vary in the same degree as their musical expression.

I cannot deny that there is such an existing condition as a talent, or a taste, for drawing, which varies considerably, and will materially affect results. But I do contend that the reason that most people cannot or will not draw is because they ignore from childhood up the heritage of a beneficent Providence; in other words, they do not apply those powers with which all are naturally endowed, viz., observation, memory, and imagination. My criterion for perfect observation is embodied in the alternative. "Can you, or can you not, reproduce an image or draw a picture of the object examined that will portray every detail?"

If you cannot, one of two things is obvious. Either your observation or your memory is defective in its workings, and in all cases defective memory is directly traceable to incomplete apprehension by the senses or by the mind; and without memory imagination is impossible. Charles Kingsley says: "The art of learning consists, first and foremost, in the art of observation."

Then, to my mind, the person who wishes to learn to draw must cultivate, first, his powers of observation, and dexterity of touch, and all other requirements will speedily be added to him.

For this reason, in teaching a class to draw any natural object, I should first ascertain by questioning, whether his sense impressions have been accurate or not. Some of the answers that display the ignorance of most pupils on commonplace objects are astounding. For instance, I have been told that a horse's eye was behind his ear, that a hen had five toes, that a sofa had two legs, and other things of a like kind, too numerous and ridiculous to bear repetition.

For such, observation lessons and tentative drill are a most important factor. Lead a pupil to use his eyes for the purpose for which they were intended, and you have passed the Rubicon in drawing.

It has been said, and this gravesin of omission confronts us, that most people go through this world with their eyes shut, but it is in our power to make our pupils more observant day by day, and more susceptible to the marvellous display of beauty, harmony, and wise arrangement that nature unfolds.

(To be concluded.)

If I can put one touch of sunset into the life of any man or woman, I shall feel that I have worked with God.—George McDonald.

ALL worldly joys grow less to the one joy of doing kindnesses.