

A PLEA FOR A NEGLECTED ART.

ONE would almost suppose that in these days, of which we, with a little self-praise, are wont to boast as the most intellectual and every way advanced which the world has yet seen, a neglected art would be hard to discover. One would almost aver that no sooner would it be recognized as an art, than it would be raised aloft into the scrutinizing light of modern intelligence, and established above neglect; and in the case of an art which was not only recognized as an art, but still further as one every way practical, one would be ready *a priori* and "*a fortiori*" to maintain that the neglect was only apparent. But *a priori* arguments must bow to those that are "*a posteriori*."

The art of which I speak is Reading. I have no doubt that to many it will seem absurd to speak of the neglect of the art of reading, in the face of the educational statistics which are periodically issued in most civilized counties, and from which we learn that the number of those who can read is constantly assuming far larger proportions, relatively to those who cannot read. The fact shown by these statistics is exceedingly gratifying to those who watch with interest the steady onward progress of mankind, but the inference drawn from the fact is to some extent a fallacy. There is a slight confusion of ideas introduced by it.

There is a confusion of quantity with quality. It is assumed that because a comparatively greater number read now-a-days than read ten or twenty years ago, therefore it is an error to speak of reading as a neglected art. This way of stating it, however, leaves out of view the possibility of only the same or a less degree of excellence, even though there are more readers. It is quite possible the quality of the reading may have remained the same as when there were fewer readers, it may even have grown worse. A comparison will illustrate my meaning. There are, I suppose, many more stained-glass windows manufactured now than there were in the 15th century; yet we are assured that the quality even of the best that can be manufactured now, is very far below that of mediæval times.

The fact is that reading is not studied as an *art*. There is even a prejudice against regarding it as an art. It is taught simply as a means, and never, except in rare cases, as an end in itself. Possibly this may be the view of it which leads to most direct use; but I think that in the end it is a great mistake.

Reading seems to be taught simply as a means of ascertaining what has been printed in books or written in M. S. This can, of course, be