

THE DESERET WEEKLY.

Truth and Liberty.

No. 7.

SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH, FEBRUARY 2, 1895.

VOL. L.

READING.

Second of the University of Utah Lecture Series, by Miss Maud M. Babcock.

"Elocution is the art of speaking language so as to make the thought it expresses clear and expressive," says Alfred Ayres. This is the most comprehensive definition that has been given of this much misunderstood art. Slightly paraphrase the sentence and we will have an excellent definition of reading, running thus: "Reading is the art of speaking written language so as to make the thought it expresses clear and impressive." Elocution therefore deals with all thought, whether it be written or extemporized—of your own or from another; reading is concerned with only written thoughts.

To extemporize our own thoughts, seems comparatively easy, natural and consequently intelligent, but some serious obstacle seems to rear its head, when we attempt our own written thoughts, but particularly when we express the thoughts of another. Then we become stilted and unnatural. Few great writers have been good readers. We have all remarked many times, that as the reader pauses to make some suggestion, or dilate upon the thought read in his own language, that he is much more natural and impressive, and we cannot but sigh when the book is taken up again, and the unnatural manner taken up with the book.

It is upon this point, which is the basis of reading and elocution, that the modern school differs from the old school. The basis of teaching at the present is to go to nature—study expression as you find it when men are unconscious, in opposition to the old teaching which dealt with tones of the voice—set gesture, and stilted, unnatural slides. Don't build artificiality, but read as you speak your own language. Conversation is therefore the model for all vocal expression.

But before thoughts can be expressed artistically the voice must be cultivated, mispronunciations and pronunciations be overcome, and the body so trained that the mind may be thoroughly possessed of the thought of the author. Reading has been likened to a tree having three strong roots—the first voice production; the second words—pronunciation, articulation, and definitions of words—third the control of the body. These roots should be deeply buried underground and only the combined strength be perceptible in the trunk and foliage. But too often the ground is torn away, or they are not buried deep enough and the rude unsightly root of pronunciation or articu-

lation is exposed—or then again the conscious movement of the body betrays that that root is not well covered, but must commonly we find that the poor voice root has been forgotten and allowed to dwindle and waste away, which mars and dwarfs the entire tree.

The development of these roots requires little of the matured brain work which the growth of the tree needs, and therefore can and should be well grounded during all the early years of a child's school life.

All the languages under the sun are taught to our students, and the graduate of our universities cannot read intelligently their mother-tongue. There is little need to dwell upon this subject for it is plain to all that our students should first and foremost be fitted well in English. It is preposterous to suppose that one year's training in our higher schools will suffice to overcome the faults and ignorance which years of neglect has brought about. As well expect the same knowledge of mathematics, with the same neglect, and same time devoted to it.

There is time enough given to reading in our schools to do all the work that even the most enthusiastic reformer in this line could desire, but the time is not spent profitably. If the same excellence was required of reading as in other branches not one in one hundred (a sweeping statement but if my experience and observation as well as that of many others prove anything, it is true) would be admitted to our universities. The reform in reading must begin in primary and grammar schools.

Earnest Legoure of the French academy, in an interesting book upon the "Art of Reading," says that "in the American Republic of North America reading aloud is justly considered to be one of the first elements of a child's education, a constituent of its basis most urgently insisted upon." He then laments that the same happy condition is not found in his own country. This great man must certainly have viewed our system from a distance—perhaps across the water, and that distance has lent enchantment to the view. To be sure, our school-law places reading as the basis of education and we have in all our schools a branch called reading; but do our children read? Some shout, some chant, some sing song and many draw and spell—but do they read? Very little more is taught them by the mastery of words, and these are rattled off as if they were so many beads upon a string.

What readest thou, my lord?
Words, words, words.

What are words? Mere ink without the thought—the soul.

We cannot lay the fault with the

teacher, for he or she has been schooled in the same routine as the child and therefore has little or no knowledge of the art. True, special schools of elocution have multiplied and the standard of elocution has been raised until it is no longer the synonym for affectation. But few indeed of the vast populace have or have been able to avail themselves of this education, and these few have become private teachers or instructors in our high schools and colleges. But the vast majority of people, teachers and students have remained in ignorance of the subject. Special teachers have been employed in drawing, music, methods, etc., to raise the standard in these subjects, but where are the special teachers of reading in our public schools? Yet our law says that reading shall be the basis, and therefore first to be considered. This needs a modification, for reading is now taught correctly in the beginning classes of our public schools; but even there voice production, gesture and articulation are slighted.

Reading of the future will and must be made the real not the theoretical basis of education. Instead of killing and dwarfing the expression which abounds in the child of six, this expression teaching will be remedied, and will give place to the higher idea—that of developing—drawing out. We will then be taught to express ourselves in the language of another, as we do our own thoughts. This is exceedingly difficult after the repressive influence of school life, but will be natural and unconscious when this training begins with the entire education.

But these important roots which we were considering a few moments ago, how and when are they to be grown? The cultivation of the voice is a mechanical process, being governed by muscles and these muscles can be developed and trained to act unconsciously, with the best result in children. All young children breathe and speak correctly, and it would be a little effort to produce a perfect instrument, if correct instruction could be given. After ten or twelve it is unusual to find a child using his vocal organ properly. Imagine then the labor of instructing the older pupil to speak properly—before he can even begin to read correctly.

But no attention whatever is given to voice building (the speaking voice I refer to) in our public schools, and as a result high, rough, nasal, disagreeable voice everywhere—in fact the rare exception is to find a voice which has not been ruined.

Teachers are far from correct as to voice production, and the constant use of it under all conditions, and without proper understanding, produces greater