

Odds and Ends.

School Room Decoration.
(By Mrs. R. C. French)

That which has made man superior to all other form of animal life is his power to express his thoughts.

The primitive man made use of words and signs alone but a desire for permanent record of thought gave rise to signs in pictures or hieroglyphic writing.

Later, growing out of this form of expression arbitrary symbols were chosen representing sound, these symbols combined formed written words, to supercede the more cumbersome forms of hieroglyphic representation.

As the races developed and the experiences of man became more complicated, and his emotions more refined and elevated, the grosser more common place form of expression of thought no longer satisfied him. He began to seek comparisons in his environment for his own experiences and those of others, and through these comparisons or the simile, was born the language of poetry.

To this, the inspiration of the voice was added and man poured forth the ecstasy of his soul in song. Song could not tell all the language of the soul, nor could it express the language of all souls.

There was yet to be added the ministry of delineation through the art of the painter, and of the sculptor, and expression of beauty in form and design through the art of the architect.

There is a sense in which every child represents within him self the sum of all the development of the past. To furnish means for expression and the growth of what is innate in the child, he must be trained to a recognition and appreciation of the beautiful in whatever language it may be expressed literature, music, painting, sculpture, or architecture.

A taste for the best is begotten of the highest ideals. A teacher must stand in the relation of interpreter to the child. It is not that he is to understand as the teacher understands, feel as the teacher feels, or see as the teacher sees, but that the teacher is to use the various forms of art in training and developing the character of the child until he is brought to feel a kinship with the best, the noblest, and the highest expressions of truth and beauty.

There is one means to this end of which I have not spoken but which should be placed first of all, and that is the means that are every where present, and appealing for recognition. I refer to the multiplied forms of the beautiful as it exists in nature.

Nature is the key to art; to know and to feel a love for nature is to have the means at hand for the interpretation of all art. There is a beauty in the sunset color never approached by the brush of the artist; no imitable delicacy in the coloring of the flower and a gorgeous splendor in the rainbow that defies imitation.

There is music in the flow of the rivulet, and in the song of the bird unheard in grandest symphony. Grandeur and sublimity in the lofty mountains which a soul may feel but not express. A tranquillity and peace in the quiet of the valley which to experience is rest.

One can not read those lines of William Cullen Bryant's,
"Thou who would'st see the lovely and the wild
Mingled in harmony on nature's face
Ascend our Rocky Mountains."

Until his eye has feasted upon the broad landscape of hill and valley, fruitful field and flowing brook stretching far away from the lofty summits that he has sought.

Nor understand Mr. Browning until he too has held the sea shell to his ear,
"To hear the murmur of the wave,"
Nor know the beauty of "Thanatopsis" until he himself has wonder amidst the beauties of "God's first temples."

Nor can he read the "Lines to a Water-fowl" until his thought has been led as he has watched the bird in its migration, to him who from zone to zone guides its merry flight aright.

A child cannot admire with Bryant,
"The beautiful clouds with fold so soft and fair,
Swimming in the pure and quiet air,
Its fleeces bathing in sunlight, while
Its shadow o'er the vale moves slow,"

Until he has learned to see in the summer cloud something of the same beauty that Bryant himself saw.

Or discover with Lowell that "there's never a leaf or a blade too mean
To be some happy creature's palace."

Will it not help to bring brightness to many a day to see the sun-shine and the joy of a fresh summer morning, to ask ourselves the question,
"Is this a time to be cloudy and sad,
When our mother Nature laughs around,
And even the deep blue heavens look glad,
And gladness breathes from the blossoming ground?"

As teachers we are too apt to lose sight of the fact that we understand largely through our own experiences.

Tennyson says of himself,
"I am a part of all that I have met,"
It is true of each one of us that no responsive chord can ever be awakened

to a sympathetic vibration save that which has its origin in a common inspiration.

Art can be interpreted alone through what we know of that which inspires,—Nature.

School-room decoration then, the object of which is to cultivate a taste for the beautiful, refine and elevate the character, and in general contribute to the fine end of education must begin with such a study of nature as will lead the child to close habitual attention too, and delight in various forms which surround him. Until such habits of participation in nature are formed the child is not prepared to appreciate, or be benefited, by any expression of it in art.

Let us begin this work of school-room decoration in a very simple way for I believe it to be the way which leads to the best results.

Study whatever natural object may be at hand, a white pebble possibly. Name it for the child, it is quartz, lead him to discover its properties; test it with glass; it will scratch glass; it is harder. You have thus led the child to a knowledge of simple qualities, and in doing that, you have started him on a voyage of discovery which has no end.

He will find the quartz crystal and knowing that you are interested in it he will bring it to you, and the initial step is taken in teaching the crystalline forms of minerals.

Right here possibly we begin to decorate the school-room for the pebble and the crystal find a place in the school-cabinet.

Let us study the trees about the school building: their habits of growth, of branching, form, size, color; form, size, and color of their parts. What trees put forth their leaves first in the summer, and lose them first in the autumn. The children will collect the various kinds of words native and imported and these too will find a place in the school cabinet, and for weeks together the bough of the fir and spruce will be beautiful the bear and often forbidding walls of the school-room.

The birds furnish a near ending source of interest to all children. What kind of nests do they build? Where do they build them? Of what material are they made? It would not be an unusual result of the interest of the children if a pet canary found a home in the school-room. What more practical lesson in ethics than the care of such a pet.

This should be made to lead to the care and ownership of some pet at home, a rabbit, a dog, a cat, a chicken what ever it may be, the responsibility which grows out of the relation of its dependence will be humanizing in its effects.

The child never tires of watching that busy worker, the brook, how it ends here and deposits there, all the time making round and beautiful in form the rough, angular pebbles in the bed. The brook will tell the child as no book can what erosion means on the surface of the earth, and Tennyson's Brook,
"Which chatters, chatters as it flows
To join the brimming river" will carry him to the side of his own brook, and will even sing for him the song which childhood learned.

Nothing can be nearer the heart of the child than the flowers, and especially dear are they when he calls them by their names. When flowers bloom their fragrance and brightness should never be wanting in the school-room. Here is the material for a practical lesson in art, in the study of harmony of color, and pleasing effects secured by tasteful arrangements. The influence of a few growing plants in the school-room window cared for by the child is always an active though a silent educator.

When a child sympathies are awakened through his love for nature he is in a condition to appreciate in the best sense the spiritual beauty embodied in good literature. Matthew Arnold has said that the acquisition of good poetry is a discipline which works deeper than any other discipline in the range of work of our schools, more than any other, too, it works of itself. How much more we appreciate the song when we know the singer. On the walls of the school-room there should be a place for those whose names are prominent in the list of the world's great writers and thinkers.

The face reflects the soul, and the presence of a good face is always a power for good. The desire to know the lives and works of those whose faces have become familiar makes the teaching of important lessons in biography, and the introduction of good literature a very natural and easy step.

Do you not find that the reading books grow stale and impracticable to the children? Put them aside often—entirely if they be not a necessary evil,—and read good, strong life giving literature with your pupils. Not petting them with comments, nor harrowing them with too frequent questions. I believe thoroughly that at the end of a year of faithful effort in such work, you will find yourselves rewarded beyond all your calculations.

A child's mind is a wonderful worker if we only trust it; his imagination is as easily improved and guided as his judgment and his memory.

One of the forms of art which is coming more and more every year to be recognized as an important factor in the education of a child is music.

I mean music as the old masters conceived it. Music that is language of great souls. School-room decoration

may be made to contribute to the cultivation of a taste for classical music by placing before the children the pictures of great composers.

A teacher once hung a picture of Mozart, which the children had framed, on the wall of her school room, the presence of that beautiful face at once enlisted an interest in the great musician, and it was not long before every child by his own effort knew the story and the life work of that wonderful composer.

The gem of application for classical music has commenced its growth when the child is able to recognize the faces and know the life histories of the great musicians.

We would not place a trashy book in the hands of a child, neither would we hang a gaudy badly colored chromo before him, and no more should we offend his natural taste for harmony by the use of music which is not standard in its character.

Let the best and only the best music find a place in the school-room. Do you not remember how much more interested you were in Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata when you knew the pathetic incident which inspired it? Your pupils should never hear it without being carried back to the time of its birth in that little room where the shoemaker worked, and his blind sister lightened the hours of labor with her music.

What a beautiful picture is that of the great composer as he played for the first time to these two enraptured listeners, while the moonlight flooded the room, this watchless composition.

To know life and to rightly understand life in all its relations is to know man. There has been no greater student of men of his passions, his hopes, his fears, his joys, his sorrows, than the painter. Nor has the hand of any other expressed them in language more eloquent or more realistic than his.

Illustrated magazines and papers of the day as well as many other sources have made easily accessible, copies and reproductions of the great works of the best painters. These our pupils should know and their daily study from the walls of the school-room will make luminous many a page of the literature and history we are teaching, and teach in more forcible ways, lessons of time, manhood and womanhood.

The object of school-room decoration is not merely to make the place in which we teach more attractive, although this of course should not be overlooked, it should always be considered a means to an end.

The painting suggests the painter, and the door is opened to lessons in biography. One biography suggests contemporaries, and the work is extended because of the suggesting of the subject itself.

If one would know a man he must know the times in which he lived, the spirit which actuated those times, and the characteristic features of them, and this is history. History cannot be known without knowing the place, and this is a phrase of geography.

To know the world's great masterpieces of art is in itself a liberal education. I doubt not that the power to enjoy a great poem or a cathedral of rare beauty can be traced in many a case through years of hard work with books and men to a first suggestion in some home or school-room decoration.

We should always remember that the best fruits pass through periods of longest maturity.

If the child has become familiar with the picture of Dante mourning for Beatrice, in later life he will be much more likely to read, "The Divine Comedy," and in every familiar reference he may meet to that which is known, or which his experience can interpret for him, he will hear the call of Virgil to Dante.
"Still go onward, and in going listen."

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