

**A REFORM OF THE COMMON
ENGLISH BRANCHES OF INSTRUCTION.
MANUAL FOR TEACHERS: AN
INTRODUCTION TO THE SERIES OF
RATIONAL READERS, PP. 1-100**

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A Reform of the Common English Branches of Instruction. Manual for Teachers: An Introduction to the Series of Rational Readers, pp. 1-100 by Ad. Douai

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A. DOUAI'S
SERIES OF
RATIONAL READERS,

combining the Principles of

PESTALOZZI'S and FRÖBEL'S Systems of Education.

With a systematic classification of English words, by which their
Pronunciation, Orthography and Etymology may be taught
readily without the use of any new signs.

v.

Manual for Teachers.

NEW YORK
E. Steiger.

1872.

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MANUAL.

The future of our great American republic depends on the progress of Education. This truism need not be proved; it is part of our national and political creed; it is scarcely ever gainsaid; thousands upon thousands of our citizens act upon it and show how much it is at their heart, by liberal donations toward purposes of education, or by devoting their unrequited services to the inspection and management of schools, or by noble efforts to improve our Pedagogic and our institutions of learning. As a consequence thereof we witness progress in educational matters in many directions: our school-buildings and their interior arrangements put those of the rest of the world into the shade. The number of our Normal Schools is rapidly increasing; there appears to prevail a wide-spread tendency to enhance the salaries, and thus to secure teachers of efficiency; besides, the number of inventions purporting to be improvements in all kinds of school apparatus and teachers' aids—not to speak of the endless variety of series of text-books for schools of every grade, — is augmenting every year.

Should we not, therefore, expect to see vast results from this almost general tendency toward educational improvements? Should we not expect to see a greater percentage of children, between 5 or 6 and 16 years of age, regular attendants at school, and a larger percentage of the average attendance pursuing the full course, and leaving as graduates, of the higher classes or grades, than anywhere else in the world?—Should not one year of school-time be productive of greater

results with us, as regards both education and instruction, than elsewhere, with pupils of the same age?

It is unfortunate that, on closer inspection, we must concede that these expectations are not borne out by reality. Dr. LEIGH's statistics on Illiteracy in the United States given in the Report of the Department of Education of 1870 prove that our country is far ahead of Germany, Switzerland, Holland, Denmark, Sweden and Norway in the percentage of illiterates to population, and of children of school age, not attending schools, to the whole number. And as regards the effects of our schooling upon the attendants—why, every report of Educational Boards will prove, that, as a rule, not more than one or two per cent of the whole number reach the highest grade of the Common School (say, the highest Grammar School Class), while more than fifty per cent never proceed beyond the mere ABC of elementary education.

It would be unjust to overlook some of the impediments to a higher standard of education, which retard the progress of our Common Schools—such as the lack of Kindergartens; the admission of too many children into the lowest classes; the irregular attendance of pupils, and the short period during which many of them are kept in school—also the very poor preparation of most teachers for their difficult and all-important calling. But if the efficiency of our *methods* of teaching were what it ought to be, all these impediments might be overcome. Teaching is a feeding of the mind; if the food of our schools were more palatable, the attendance would be considerably larger, teachers would find more self-enjoyment in their calling and would feel encouraged and stimulated to do more justice to it, and better results of their efforts would lead to further improvements such as are necessary to a more rapid progress.

The importance of a great reform in the methods of teaching has not only been long felt, but many partial improvements have been made in that direction—yet with results that are far from being satisfactory. If our school reformers have as yet not succeeded in reforming all that ought to be reformed—is it their fault that *so much* is to be reformed?

The manner in which what is called "the Common English

Branches" (Pronunciation, Orthography, Grammar, Etymology and Elocution) are commonly taught, presents a strange contrast to the progressive spirit of our age. It consumes almost all the time in the teaching of Language, as though there were no such things which should be learned in the world as Natural Sciences, Arts and Mathematics; it succeeds even in teaching English so poorly, that there are very few persons in the country who can in every case determine, on sufficient grounds, what is really good and correct English; it develops the mind of the pupils in a most one-sided way, addressing itself to the memory and passive receptivity of the learner, and neglecting the culture of his intellect, moral faculties and artistic tastes and abilities, as though there had never existed those great prophets of Harmonious Development and reformers of Pedagogy, PESTALOZZI, DIESTERWEG, and FRÖBEL; it makes the teacher a mere machine for rehearsing recitations,—the pupil a mere machine for committing to memory the sounds and spellings and definitions of words, and the contents of some text-books, which are soon after forgotten—in short, its results are trivial in comparison with the time and money spent on attaining them. But, what is worse, it does irreparable harm by blunting and impoverishing the mental and moral faculties of most pupils, so that they remain forever beyond the pale of self-improvement.

A one-sided development of human faculties will always blunt and impoverish, if not stifle, those which are neglected. The cultivation of the receptive powers merely must needs curtail the measure of the reflective, active and sensitive powers. Dwarfed powers beget discontent, while an over-exertion of the one power begets disgust with its exercise. When young children, full of life and hungry for knowledge of live facts and laws, are, from the outset, confined to that senseless practice of elementary spelling, without reading, for one or two years, they become disgusted with it. Those who overcome that disgust and are assigned a great number of spelling exercises of difficult words, without learning Etymologically their appropriate uses in language, can certainly not be said to make much progress in the development of their

reflective, active and artistic powers. Again much of their school-time is wasted on dry lessons in that driest of all studies—Grammar. The study of this subject, as commonly pursued, is about as nearly useless as anything can be. It consists chiefly in memorizing definitions and rules (many of which are at variance with the teachings of Comparative Philology) and in *parsing* and *analyzing* sentences, without attending to *Composition*. Pupils are required to continue separating language into parts, without being taught how to construct it into correct and appropriate sentences.. Indeed the pupils are not even led to see any practical use for their knowledge of Grammar, and finally they detest it altogether.

A portion of their time is spent in “learning by heart” words called Arithmetical definitions and rules; also definitions and names in Geography. Fortunately these subjects afford a little relief to the pupil, as he obtains some glimpse of their practical application and utility. But unfortunately the pupil’s enfeebled mental powers, his growing disgust with mere word-learning, and the frequent lack of skill on the part of teachers to make the subjects of Arithmetic and Geography interesting,—all conspire to destroy this interest and prevent even these subjects from affording as much relief as they might otherwise give. Such a course of teaching out-Herods Herod, who could kill only the bodies of a few babies, while this falsely-called teaching continues to kill the minds of millions by destroying their hunger and thirst for *facts, laws and reasons*.

Language is but a means to an end: it is not in itself an end. It is an organ or tool of production, not production itself. Mankind have to learn so many important, nay, even indispensable things, that the learning of language, the medium merely of all other learning, should be made easier. — Besides, the rapid growth in our age of all the sciences and arts swells the volume of things to be learned in youth to such dimensions, that the acquisition of Pronunciation, and Orthography, and Grammar, the veriest rudiments of language, ought to be facilitated as much as possible. If our boys and girls spend the greatest part of their school-days in mastering the difficulties of the mere out-

ward form of the language, without its contents—they are cracking nutshells without ever getting at the kernel.

It may be objected, that in the English Language the Pronunciation and spelling are much more difficult than in any other; that they baffle all attempts at reform. The present work is chiefly devoted to the task of showing that the difficulties in the sounding and spelling of English are greatly overrated. We broadly assert and will prove, 1) that the Pronunciation of the spoken and written language, *as it is*, may be taught according to a moderate number of rules, so as to master more and better English in much less time than now; 2) that a Phonographic System might be introduced into our language within one generation, and in an easy and gradual manner, through the medium of our schools, by *rational teaching*. Those who feel inclined to doubt these two assertions, are earnestly invited to study the subject as presented in this Manual.

The two reforms mentioned are of the utmost importance. If it cannot be denied that the whole future of our free institutions and the happiness of our nation depend upon the best and highest possible education of all our citizens; and if the English ABC and the manner of presenting it in our schools prevent an enormous majority of the pupils from getting beyond it to their mental and moral food; we have scarcely any more momentous thing to do, than to reform our ABC and the manner of teaching it.

This must be so much the more evident, as English is a composite language, most roots of which are not of themselves transparent in their meaning to the youthful learner, much less their derivatives. The number of words easily understood by most beginners cannot be estimated at any higher figure than five or six hundred. Millions of children of foreign birth, or of parents of foreign birth, do not understand half as many. Estimating the number of words constituting the language of daily life and classical literature at 12,000, we have more than eleven thousand words and several thousands of sayings which must be explained in school, if they are ever to be understood and correctly and beautifully applied in after-life. Is it to be wondered at, that classical works of English Literature remain forever