

**AMERICAN SYSTEM
OF EDUCATION; THE
LINGUAL READER**

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American System of Education; The Lingual Reader by Literary Association

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LITERARY ASSOCIATION

**AMERICAN SYSTEM
OF EDUCATION; THE
LINGUAL READER**

AMERICAN SYSTEM OF EDUCATION.

THE

LINGUAL READER.

"Man is man only by means of speech."—W. VON HUMBOLDT.



By a Literary Association.

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DR. WISDOM ON LEARNING OUR LANGUAGE.

Dr. Wisdom and Professor Cairns spent many evenings in discussing questions connected with education. The subject of language occupied a large place in these friendly discussions. It was clearly seen by both, that the study of our native tongue was too much overlooked. Pupils, it was admitted, gave attention to spelling, and, in most cases, to etymology. They were exercised, too, in the grammar of language; but LANGUAGE itself, as a product of the mind, was rarely, if ever, studied in our primary schools. This fact produced a deep impression on their minds. Dr. Wisdom, at the solicitation of the Professor, prepared and delivered an address on the subject before an Association of Teachers, in their native county. The substance of this address, the Association is happy in being able to lay before American Educators.

Gentlemen, said Dr. Wisdom, I propose, at this interview, to direct your attention to the English language, as a proper subject of study for children. Understand what I propose. It is not orthography;—it is not grammar merely, with its dry rules and details;—it is not even composition. It is LANGUAGE, embracing these, and more than these. It is language, as the product of the mind—English language, as the product of the English mind.

Language, gentlemen, as you are well aware, is the noblest work of man. Believing as I do in its Divine origin, so far at least as the *form* of human speech is concerned, and sufficient materials for the exercise of art, still I see in the increase of these materials, the perfecting of the first form of speech, and the various combinations of words by which all thoughts are made known, enough to command admiration—enough to give language the

highest place among the works of art. As such, I wish, gentlemen, to see it studied and known.

Do you ask why? No, gentlemen, you know better. You would not ask such a question. I will answer it, however. It may be that others will ask it, and through you, demand a reply. As the product of mind, it is a work by which mind is to be known. So we know the carpenter—so we know the painter and sculptor. But it is the work of English mind. Our fathers, through a long lapse of ages, have been building it up to its present magnificent proportions. The heart of our people is to be seen and felt in it. Its history is their true history—its structure the actual expression of their heart. As a mirror, it reflects their image upon us. As such, let it be studied.

Do you ask how? This, gentlemen, is a great question. It is one that may receive a variety of answers. To my mind, there is one simple and natural way, and only one—its own. Whenever any thing can be viewed in its natural unfoldings, and its features observed and marked as they appear from time to time, experience and wisdom at once direct our minds to these unfoldings as the happiest method of obtaining correct knowledge. *Seeing*, then, becomes a synonyme for knowing. Now, all this is practicable in the study of our language. The new-born infant contains within it the germ of speech. The influences of the family awaken it, and soon its developments begin to make their appearance in the elements of language. And who will say, gentlemen, that the *individual growth* of our language is not a happy type of the English mind, as seen in our mother-tongue!

Gentlemen, in this way, we may study language. We can become pupils, and sit at the feet of our children. But how are *they* to study it? Are they to wait until they become men, and follow our example? Why should it be so! No, gentlemen! No! Let them study it as they make it. Let them learn the nature and idiom of our language as they pick up words by the wayside of life. *Imitation* is natural to the mind, and may be pressed into the service of the child, when he forms sentences, as well as when he draws the outlines of objects. By imitation, let him construct a language for himself, and by construction, learn its nature. By imitation, guided by an observing mind, let him shape words into sentences according to the rules of grammar, which are only the properties or features of language, and should, wherever it is practicable, be acquired, not as any thing distinct from speech, but as its vital element.

Gentlemen, nature forces this method upon us in the acquisition of oral speech. Why do we abandon it, when we teach written language—the

visible form of speech! Because we are untrue to nature, and have been deceived by false art. Let us cease to be untrue. Let deception die. I direct you to the footprints of nature. Go to the nursery, and from that place of germs retrace, in written language, the steps of the child in oral speech. Do so, and all is simple and agreeable. The child finds himself at home at every step. He is thoughtfully walking over ground on which he has played again and again; and as he builds by imitative thought a language for himself out of his mother-tongue, acquires a clear insight into its make and structure. So, gentlemen, let the minds of our children be trained in gaining a knowledge of their mother-tongue.

The Literary Association regards the principles of Dr. Wisdom, as laid down in the above outline of his address, as something of a discovery in teaching children to read the English language. They are taught first to understand it; and this, too, in the only feasible way—its actual construction. Every child builds up for himself an individual language out of the materials of his mother-tongue.

The Association, in carrying out these principles, regards written language as the visible form of speech. The eye takes the place of the ear. They regard it also as the medium through which study is mainly conducted. How is it to be conducted satisfactorily, unless the child understands the medium! And in what way can he be taught to understand it so readily as in its construction! The builder only is familiar with the building.

The manner, in which these views are carried out, is simple. A father leads his child into an acquaintance with his language. He does so in lively conversation—the form of writing that agrees best with the habits of the child, and furnishes the most pleasing introduction to formal instruction—a form of writing that supplies the happiest means of learning *inflection* and other principles of reading. The Association thinks that a child taught in this way his native tongue, will enjoy the advantages of a cultivated household, and learn to read it naturally by first learning to understand it. A pleasing style of conversation, and a correct knowledge of practical grammar, will be attending results.

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