

Educational Books: A Brief Survey

IN presenting this brief survey of some of the educational books published during the past year, we would remind the reader that the recommendation of a new book does not necessarily imply that it should supplant some other work already established in the field. It is a fact that perhaps the majority of school books coming from the press have no *raison d'être* except a commercial one, and this applies even to many books, good in themselves, which are yet not distinctly better than what they are intended to supersede. We have attempted in the following notices to call attention to the more deserving work turned out during the year by the teachers of the country and by the educational publishers.

ENGLISH

In the teaching of English it seems as tho what may be roughly called kindergarten methods were growing upon us more and more—as tho the discipline of severe and serious study were to be sacrificed to the pupil's amusement and the teacher's popularity. How much of our grandfathers' superiority in vigor of thought and expression was due to their acquiring a good part of their education through a classic or otherwise sinewy medium, it is impossible to say; but the contrast between such reading matter as they were exercised upon and reprints from the *Youth's Companion* is, be it said with all deference to that admirable periodical within its own sphere, at least a very striking and suggestive one. Under these circumstances it is fortunate that the firms which have already done so much for the promulgation of good literature should continue their services in spite of this momentary aberration. An edition of *THE LADY OF THE LAKE* by Edwin Ginn (Ginn & Co.) has an introductory note on "Classics for Children" with some excellent remarks on this general subject. And in the same spirit, it may be supposed, the Macmillan Company has augmented its Pocket Classics with Shakespeare's *HAMLET* and *AS YOU LIKE IT*, Macaulay's *LORD CLIVE*, Chaucer's *PROLOGUE*, and a selec-

tion of Wordsworth's *SHORTER POEMS*. To be sure all these things are in a sense works of supererogation; they merely do over what has been done already. But when we find a *SELECT POEMS OF COLERIDGE* ably edited by A. J. George (D. C. Heath & Co.), and at least three collections of English poetry, the outlook begins to brighten encouragingly.

Dr. Whiteford's *ANTHOLOGY OF ENGLISH POETRY FROM BEOWULF TO KIPPLING* (Benjamin Sanborn & Co.) is a thorough-paced text-book and succeeds in focusing upon the poems quoted a number of cross lights which ought to be instructive to the student, however distracting they might be to another sort of reader. The book, in spite of its general excellence of choice, is a little impaired as a representative of literary continuity by including only a single and brief specimen of the whole period from 1066 to 1340, and as a reader by a trace of pedantry—just a suspicion of the philologist's madness of method and craze for origins. *ENGLISH POEMS FROM CHAUCER TO KIPLING*, edited by Professor Parrott, of Princeton, and A. W. Long (Ginn & Co.), strikes us as a first rate book for secondary schools, to which it directs itself. Without any pretension to completeness it contains a brief sketch of the history of English poetry, a careful selection of material, and a set of brief notes and comments conceived in the literary spirit. For any thorough study of poetry, however, Professor Alden's *ENGLISH VERSE* (Henry Holt & Co.) will be found hereafter well nigh indispensable. The volume is accurate, systematic, scholarly—scientific if one like the word—without being captious, pedantic or otherwise extravagant. It consists of four parts. The first contains specimens to exhibit the principles of English versification, arranged in order of topics; the second illustrates the development of the most prevalent forms of verse in chronological order. The examples are connected by a commentary in smaller type into an admirably concise, and at the same time thorough exposition of metrical theory. Part III includes a discussion of the Time-Element, while Part IV handles the subject of Meter in

extracts drawn from various critics from Aristotle to Professor Gummere. In short, Professor Alden is to be congratulated on having produced a book which is in almost every respect a model of professional scholarship.

When now one turns from these books to those that deal particularly with the teaching of the language, one cannot fail to be struck with evidences of the present ferment and uncertainty prevailing throughout this field of education in the curious mixture of pictures, literature in rather scant measure, and copious and emollient comment out of which many of these volumes are compounded. To this sort of debilitating emulsion *EVERYDAY ENGLISH FOR INTERMEDIATE GRADES*, by Jean Sherwood Rankin (Educational Publishing Company), is a welcome exception. The vehicle is much less flaccid, much more nervous than is by any means usual, and is moreover, we should suppose, really interesting and stimulating to those addressed. Even here, however, one might suggest that the maker of the book is doing a good deal of the teachers' and pupils' work for them. In this connection the attempt to teach grammar, and to some extent rhetoric, directly from literature, as in Manley and Hailman's *ENGLISH LANGUAGE* (C. C. Birchard & Co.) ought not to be passed over without a word of commendation in contrast with the injudicious efforts of the "laboratory" method to excite the student to feverish spasms of "creative" zeal.

Of "histories" and "literatures" the number is small. Among them should be noted especially Dr. McMurray's *SPECIAL METHOD IN THE READING OF ENGLISH CLASSICS* (the Macmillan Company), which advocates very strongly the reading of good literature and reading it entire in its original unabbreviated shape. Such reading, in place of fragments and short selections, might well do something to strengthen the failing sense of form and knit up the relaxing power of concentration which is becoming more of a menace to our civilization every day. The book is rather a discussion for teachers than a text-book proper, and in its recognition of certain slighted truths ought to do considerable good. It insists vigorously upon "the intangible excellence

of superior literature, which defies all exact measurement by the yardstick," and renders futile any substitution of "scientific" method for literary sense and enthusiasm on the teacher's part. And no less vigorously does it insist upon the need of seriousness, of something besides "dreamy, hammock-soothing vacation idling with pleasant stories." In words this may seem a small thing; and yet if even as much as is here suggested could be carried out, it would go near to work a revolution. A *STUDENT'S HISTORY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE*, by W. E. Simonds (Houghton, Mifflin & Co.), is possessed of some very obvious merits. It is lucid, orderly, consecutive, and of marked literary flavor in spite of an occasional latter day flippancy or impertinence, as to speak of "the unavoidable monotony of these unvarying stanzas" in reference to the "Fairie Queen." In a book of this kind there is, of course, no great room for first hand judgments or impressions; and it is no drawback to the work that many of the *sententiæ* are conventional, particularly as they gain an air of freshness in the presentation. But it is a grave defect, for instance, that one should look in vain for any account or even an enumeration of Dryden's substantial services to criticism and English prose. While in addition—and we speak of it the more readily because it is so general a failing—the whole book shows something of that inchoateness which results from trying to carry too many interests at once. Here, for example, are noticeable distinct traces of the historical, the critical, the bibliographical, the literary-pedagogical, so to call it, in questions and suggestions for study, as well as the biographical. This is to confuse things very badly. Why is it not possible, even in a school book, to consider the history of literature as the growth of a certain kind of thought—the kind of thought which results from the general contemplation of life, and to treat it in such a way as to show running through all its modifications and transitions the thread of a continuous development? Let us not, however, lose sight in all this of the positive fact that the book immediately before us belongs among the best of recent publications of its sort.