

# Educational Books: A Brief Survey

IN accordance with our usual custom we give in this number a list of some of the more important school books published during the year. Space will not permit of thorough reviews, but the critical comments appended are designed to give a sufficient idea of the character of the works to enable a teacher to determine what of them he needs to investigate. The choice of a textbook depends so much on the personal methods of the teacher and the conditions under which he works that it is impossible to assist him more than by extending the range of this choice. A textbook is like a suit of clothes, the one that fits the wearer is the best for him. It should be understood that the present list is merely supplementary to the many educational books to which we have given special reviews during the year.

## English

- Standard English Classics.* Essays of Lamb, by G. A. Wauchope, 50 cents. Macaulay's Life of Johnson, by C. L. Hanson, 25 cents. Irving's Goldsmith, by C. R. Gaston, 50 cents. Tennyson's Idyls of the King, selected by Willis Boughton, 25 cents. Boston: Glinn & Co.
- Dickens's Christmas Stories.* By Jane Gordon. New York: American Book Co.
- Hawthorne's Wonder Book for Girls and Boys.* New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. \$1.50.
- Rolfe's Shakespeare.* Macbeth, Twelfth Night, Hamlet, King Lear, Othello, The Tempest, Midsummer Night's Dream, As You Like It, The Merchant of Venice. New York: American Book Co. 50 cents.
- Modern English Prose.* Selected and edited by G. R. Carpenter and W. T. Brewster. The Macmillan Co. \$1.00.
- Macaulay's Life of Johnson.* By A. P. Walker. Boston: D. C. Heath & Co. 25 cents.

- The Gateway Series.* Edited by Henry Van Dyke. Burke's Conciliation with America, by Wm. Macdonald, 35 cents. Carlyle's Burns, by Edwin Micus, 35 cents. The Merchant of Venice, by F. E. Schelling, 35 cents. Silas Marner, by W. L. Cross, 40 cents. Macaulay's Milton, by E. L. Gulick, 35 cents. New York: American Book Co.
- Riverside Literature Series.* Edited by Bliss Perry. Irving's Goldsmith, by Willis Boughton, 45 cents. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co.
- Macaulay's Milton and Addison.* By J. A. Tufts. New York: Henry Holt & Co.
- The Making of English.* By Henry Bradley. New York: The Macmillan Co. \$1.00.
- Forms of English Poetry.* By Chas. F. Johnson. New York: American Book Co. \$1.00.
- Elements of English Composition for Secondary Schools.* By T. F. Huntington. New York: The Macmillan Co. 60 cents.
- Everyday English for Grammar Grades.* By Jean S. Rankin. Boston: Educational Publishing House. 50 cents.

THERE is such a lack of agreement about the teaching of English that it is pretty difficult to find a point of view from which to criticise such texts and readings as may get themselves published from time to time. It seems safe to say, however, that the sense for literature, which all agree upon as the desirable end, cannot be aroused or cultivated on the basis of a single piece or even of a single author, or, for that matter, of a single period. Literature is a specific which must be taken in large doses to do any very great good.

With respect to the mere article of variety, indeed, the publications of the year offer very little opening to adverse criticism. Seldom, in fact, has there been so great a number of titles. But to the rather imposing array there wants that single eye for the highest excellence

which is so very essential in such a matter. There is not a single introductory essay of genuine critical merit, of the sort that ought to furnish out our reading texts; the nearest approach to it, tho at something of a remove still, being probably the remarks prefixed to Lamb's Essays, while in the choice of authors it seems as tho the present disposition to compromise between amusement and edification were likely to destroy all serious literary discipline for some time. In this regard the elementary texts are naturally in the worst case—so much so that one is almost justified in the paradox that any book is better for children than one made for their use. For this reason it seems safest to prefer some such carefully prepared volume as this of Dickens's *Christmas Stories*, while Hawthorne's *Wonder Book* may be looked upon as an exception, both in itself and in its present attractively illustrated shape. Unfortunately, however, this literary laxity is by no means confined to the provision for youth, but extends even to the advanced readings. There is, of course, the usual disproportionate display of Shakespearean texts, among which should be noticed the reissue of Dr. Rolfe's well proved edition of Shakespeare, in a rather handier form and with the convenient excision of textual variants and such other matters as are now more properly and easily available elsewhere, together with a thorough revision of the commentary to suit the present state of educational thought. But, outside of this eminently safe name, the titles are scattering and haphazard, as tho there were no consensus of opinion in regard to what is either classic or essential, as is indeed the case. A good deal of this scattération is probably due to the assignments for admission to college, which are to every appearance utterly unsystematic and planless—but not all of it, as is curiously illustrated by Carpenter and Brewster's *English Prose*. In its way the book seems likely to be useful, for the selections are numerous and comprehensive. But tho they may supply valuable illustrative material for rhetorical demonstrations, they are too short to be of much assistance in the cultivation of a literary taste and habit, and are, indeed, singularly chosen. There is Gibbon, but no vestige of Burke, while Hamlin Garland,

James Lane Allen, Maurice Hewlett and Jack London are huddling side by side, as tho to keep each other in countenance in the immediate vicinity of Hawthorne and Scott, to say nothing of a bit of collaboration on English words by Greenough and Kittredge cheek by jowl with Matthew Arnold's "Sweetness and Light." At the same time it is reassuring to see an awakening of interest in the eighteenth century, at first and second hand, in creditably edited editions, among others, of Macaulay's *Life of Johnson* and Burke's *Speech on Conciliation with America*. The former, by A. P. Walker, has a rather promising manner of presenting explanatory matter, not in the usual mode of note and dissertation, but by means of plans, tables and the like easily intelligible exhibits; while the latter includes a plain sufficiency of notes and a clear statement of the political situation by a professor of history, which innovation begins to look a little like a happy reconciliation between literature and general thought. There is, besides, an *Irving's Goldsmith* by Dr. Boughton, admirable, like the other members of its series, for its cheapness, its typographical neatness and its freedom from editorial lumber—in short, for its readableness.

Besides these reading-texts there are one or two other books, amid a strange dearth of "literatures," which deserve some notice. Among them is a popular and interesting sketch of the development and characteristic peculiarities of the English grammar and vocabulary, very suitable for general reading or study, by Dr. Bradley, one of the editors of the Oxford Dictionary. Professor Johnson's *English Poetry*, too, promises well in its kind. It contains a careful account, fully illustrated by well chosen quotations, of the several species of English verse, with some small reference to their historical development, tho what constitutes the merit of the book is rather the fact that it is written appreciatively and is animated by a thoroughly literary spirit. Among the rhetoricians in general there is still altogether too much insistence upon original writing on the part of those of tender years. It is certainly very doubtful indeed whether Mr. Huntington, who is one of the most forward with his opinion, is likely to do so much good as harm in asserting that every one, chil-

dren included, should be made to form the writing habit at the start, as he is certainly wrong in assuming "an abundance of fresh and entertaining ideas" to be in widest commonalty spread. But in the way they are taking it is at least encouraging to see them recognizing the importance of thought to composition and the necessary connection between reading and writing. Perhaps the most commendable book of this sort is *Everyday English*. There seems a rather unnecessary amount of verbal condescension about it, an excessive precaution to scale the language and the selections down to the pupils, rather than the pupils up to literature; but the constant accompaniment of precept with example and the consequent stress upon subject-matter is very well.