

TEACHING YOUR CHILD

TO READ



USING CHARLOTTE MASON'S METHOD

Compiled by Barbie Nesbitt for the Appian Way School

NOTES TO THE TEACHER FROM CHARLOTTE MASON

Ambleside Online SUGGESTIONS FOR READING in YEARS 0-3:

Phonics/Reading instruction: (There are suggestions on the AO website, and you may choose any curriculum that meets the needs of your child. Ruth Beechick's methods, as described in her *Three R's* series, are excellent.) Begin by reading, reading, reading, reading and talking to your child each day. Then teach the alphabet, followed by phonics rules, sight words, and then move on to early readers.

Oral Narration (oral composition) of various subjects--literature, history, picture study, and so on: ***This is absolutely foundational to the entire Charlotte Mason method.*** Allow your student a year or two to develop into a fluent narrator, but do not neglect this part of language arts.

Copywork: (This will expose children to the form of written sentences on a page, and be the beginning of learning to spell, as well as covering handwriting practice. You may choose to use a handwriting curriculum as well, but be careful not to burden young children with too much written work. ***Less is more***, and children should write only as much as they can write perfectly.)

Simply Charlotte Mason SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHING SIGHT WORDS CM Style:

I started sight words straight out of CM's first volume. First I printed off a poem called the Violet. Then I took the first ten words and typed them and pasted so there were about six copies of each word. I printed them and then cut them all up and placed in a ziplock baggy. I also had a complete first part of the poem typed up so I had a copy. I would show her the word on a slate then have her spell it out with her loose letters. I would then have her find all 6 copies that were scattered about on the floor. After she found all six I would have her make a sentence with the word. After doing all the words the next day would be review. I would say the word and she would spell it. I put all the completed sight words on a 3*5 card so we could continue reviewing. After we had completed the entire poem I started having her place words in a sentence and then reading it off to me. It was quite delightful! I followed CM to a T and it worked like a charm! After we had finished the entire poem we had several sight words from words like "to" to words like "modest".

The VIOLET

**Down in a green and shady bed,
A modest violet grew;
Its stalk was bent, it hung its head
As if to hide from view.
And yet it was a lovely flower,
Its colour bright and fair;
It might have graced a rosy bower,
Instead of hiding there.**

**Yet thus it was content to bloom,
In modest tints arrayed;
And there diffused a sweet perfume,
Within the silent shade.**

Then let me to the valley go

**This pretty flower to see;
That I may also learn to grow**

In sweet humility.

Charlotte's Words, From the Home Schooling Series, vol 1 pg 199

IV.--Reading

Time of Teaching to Read, an Open Question.--Reading presents itself first amongst the lessons to be used as instruments of education, although it is open to discussion whether the child should acquire the art unconsciously, from his infancy upwards, or whether the effort should be deferred until he is, say, six or seven, and then made with vigour. In a valuable letter, addressed to her son John, we have the way of teaching to read adopted by that pattern mother, the mother of the Wesleys:--

Mrs Wesley's Plan.--"None of them was taught to read till five years old, except Kezzy, in whose case I was overruled; and she was more years in learning than any of the rest had been months. The way of teaching was this: the day before a child began to learn, the house was set in order, every one's work appointed them, and a charge given that no one should come into the room from nine to twelve, or from two to five, which were our school hours. One day was allowed the child wherein to learn its letters, and each of them did in that time know all its letters, great and small, except Molly and Nancy, who were a day and a half before they knew them perfectly, for which I thought them then very dull; but the reason I thought them so was because the rest learned them so readily; and your brother Samuel, who was the first child I ever taught, learned the alphabet in a few hours. He was five years old the tenth of February; the next day we began to learn, and as soon as he knew the letters, began at the first chapter of Genesis. He was taught to spell the first verse, then to read it over and over until he could read it off-hand without hesitation; so on, to the second verse, etc., till he took ten verses for a lesson, which he quickly did. Easter fell low that year, and by Whitsuntide he could read a chapter very well; for he read continually, and had such a prodigious memory, that I cannot remember to have told him the same word twice. What was yet stranger, any word he had learnt in his lesson he knew wherever he saw it, either in his Bible or any other book, by which means he learned very soon to read an English author well." [Southey's *Life of Wesley*].

It is much to be wished that thoughtful mothers would more often keep account of the methods they employ with their children, with some definite note of the success of this or that plan.

Many persons consider that to learn to read a language so full of anomalies and difficulties as our own is a task which should not be imposed too soon on the childish mind. But, as a matter of fact, few of us can recollect how or when we learned to read: for all we know, it came by nature, like the art of running; and not only so, but often mothers of the educated classes do not know how their children learned to read. 'Oh, he taught himself,' is all the account his mother can give of little Dick's proficiency. Whereby it is plain, that this notion of the extreme difficulty of learning to read is begotten by the elders rather than by the children. There would be no little books entitled *Reading Without Tears*, if tears were not sometimes shed over the reading lesson; but, really, when that is the case, the fault rests with the teacher.

The Alphabet.--As for his letters, the child usually teaches himself. He has his box of ivory letters and picks out *p* for pudding, *b* for blackbird, *h* for horse, big and little, and knows them both. But the learning of the alphabet should be made a means of cultivating the child's observation: he should be made to see what he looks at. Make big *B* in the air, and let him name it; then let him make round *O*, and crooked *S*, and *T* for Tommy, and you name the letters as the little finger forms them with unsteady strokes in the air. To make the small letters thus from memory is a work of more art, and requires more careful observation on the child's part. A tray of sand is useful at this stage. The child draws his finger boldly through the sand, and then puts a back to his *D*; and behold, his first essay in making a straight line and a curve. But the devices for making the learning of the 'A B C' interesting are endless. There is no occasion to hurry the child: let him learn one form at a time, and know it so well that he can pick out the *d*'s, say, big and little, in a page of large print. Let him say *d* for duck, dog, doll, thus: *d*-uck, *d*-og, prolonging the sound of the initial consonant, and at last sounding *d* alone, not *dee*, but *d'*, the mere sound of the consonant separated as far as possible from the following vowel.

Let the child alone, and he will learn the alphabet for himself: but few mothers can resist the pleasure of teaching it; and there is no reason why they should, for this kind of learning is no more than play to the child, and if the alphabet be *taught* to the little student, his appreciation of both form and sound will be cultivated. When should he begin? Whenever his box of letters begins to interest him. The baby of two will often be able to name half a dozen letters; and there is nothing against it so long as the finding and naming of letters is a game to him. But he must not be urged, required to show off, teased to find letters when his heart is set on other play.

Word-making. The first exercises in the making of words will be just as pleasant to the child. Exercises treated as a game, which yet teach the powers of the letters, will be better to begin with than actual sentences. Take up two of his letters and make the syllable 'at': tell him it is the word we use when we say 'at home,' 'at school.' Then put *b* to 'at'--*bat*; *c* to 'at'--*cat*; *f*, *h*, *m*, *s*, *r*, and so on. First, let the child say what the word becomes with each initial consonant to 'at,' in order to make *hat*, *pat*, *cat*. Let the syllables all be actual words which he knows. Set the words in a row, and let him read them off. Do this with the short vowel sounds in combination with each of the consonants, and the child will learn to read off dozens of words of three letters, and will master the short-vowel sounds with initial and final consonants without effort. Before long he will do the lesson for himself. 'How many words can you make with "en" and another letter, with "od" and another letter?' etc. Do not hurry him.

Word-making with Long Vowels, etc.--When this sort of exercise becomes so easy that it is no longer interesting, let the long sounds of the vowels be learnt in the same way: use the same syllables as before with a final *e*; thus 'at' becomes 'ate,' and we get *late*, *pate*, *rate*, etc. The child may be told that *a* in 'rate' is *long a*; *a* in 'rat' is *short a*. He will make the new sets of words with much facility, helped by the experience he gained in the former lessons.

Then the same sort of thing with final 'ng'--'ing,' 'ang,' 'ong,' 'ung'; as in *ring*, *fang*, *long*, *sung*: initial 'th,' as *then*, *that*: final 'th,' as *with*, *pith*, *hath*, *lath*, and so on, through endless combinations which will suggest themselves. This is not reading, but it preparing the ground for reading; words will be no longer unfamiliar, perplexing objects, when the child meets with them in a line of print. Require him to pronounce the words he makes with such finish and distinctness that he can himself hear and count the sounds in given way.

Early Spelling.--Accustom him from the first to shut his eyes and spell the word he has made. This is important. Reading is not spelling, nor is it necessary to spell in order to read well; but the good speller is the child whose eye is quick enough to take in the letters which compose it, in the act of reading off a word, and this is a habit to be acquired from the first: *accustom* him to see the letters in the word, and he will do without effort.

If words were always made on a given pattern in English, if the same letter always represented the same sounds, learning to read would be an easy matter; for the child would soon acquire the few elements of which all words would, in that case, be composed. But many of our English words are, each, a law unto itself: there is nothing for it, but the child must learn to know them at sight; he must recognise 'which,' precisely as he recognises 'B,' because he has seen it before, been made to look at it with interest, so that the pattern of the word is stamped upon his retentive brain. This process should go on side by side with the other--the learning of the powers of the letters; for the more variety you can throw into his reading lessons, the more will the child enjoy them. Lessons in word-making help him to take intelligent interest in *words*; but his progress in the art of reading depends chiefly on the 'reading at sight' lessons.

Reading at Sight.--The teacher must be content to proceed very slowly, securing the ground under her feet as she goes. Say--

**"Twinkle, twinkle, little star,
How I wonder what you are,"**

is the first lesson; just those two lines. Read the passage for the child, very slowly, sweetly, with just expression, so that it is pleasant to him to listen. Point to each word as you read. Then point to 'twinkle,' 'wonder,' 'star,' 'what,'--and expect the child to pronounce each word in the verse taken promiscuously; then, when he shows that he knows each word by itself, and not before, let him *read* the two lines with clear enunciation and expression: insist from the first on clear, beautiful reading, and do not let the child fall into a dreary monotone, no more pleasant to himself than to his listener. Of course, by this time he is able to say the two lines; and let him say them clearly and beautifully. In his after lesson he will learn the rest of the little poem.

The Reading of Prose.--At this stage, his reading lessons must advance so slowly that he may just as well learn his reading exercises, both prose and poetry, as recitation lessons. Little poems suitable to be learned in this way will suggest themselves at once; but perhaps prose is better, on the whole, as offering more of the words in everyday use, of Saxon origin, and of anomalous spelling. Short fables, and such graceful, simple prose as we have in Mrs Gatty's *Parables from Nature*, and, still better, in Mrs Barbauld's prose poems, are very suitable. Even for their earliest reading lessons, it is unnecessary to put twaddle into the hands of children.

But we have not yet finished the reading lesson on 'Twinkle, twinkle little star.' The child should hunt through two or three pages of good clear type for 'little,' 'star,' 'you,' 'are,' each of the words he has learned, until the word he knows looks out upon him like the face of a friend in a crowd of strangers, and he is able to pounce upon it anywhere. Lest he grow weary of the search, the teacher should guide him, unawares, to the line or paragraph where the word he wants occurs. Already the child has accumulated a little capital; he knows eight or ten words so well that he will recognise them anywhere, and the lesson has occupied probably ten minutes.

The next 'reading at sight' lesson will begin with a hunt for the familiar words, and then--

**"Up above the world so high,
Like a diamond in the sky,"**

should be gone through in the same way. As spelling is simply the art of *seeing*, seeing the letters in a word as we see the features of a face--say to the child, 'Can you spell sky?'--or any of the shorter words. He is put on his mettle, and if he fails this time, be sure he will be able to spell the word when you ask him next; but do not let him *learn* to spell or even say the letters aloud with the word before him.

As for understanding what they read, the children will be full of bright, intelligent remarks and questions, and will take this part of the lesson into their own hands; indeed, the teacher will have to be on her guard not to let them carry her away from the subject.

Careful Pronunciation.--The little people will probably have to be pulled up on the score of pronunciation. They must render 'high,' sky,' 'like,' 'world,' with delicate precision; 'diamond,' they will no doubt wish to hurry over, and say as 'di'mond,' just as they will reduce 'history' to 'hist'ry.' But here is another advantage of slow and steady progress--the *saying* of each word receives due attention, and the child is trained in the habit of careful enunciation. Every day increases the number of words he is able to read at sight, and the more words he knows already, the longer his reading lesson becomes in order to afford the ten or dozen new words which he should master every day.

A Year's Work.--'But what a snail's progress!' you are inclined to say. Not so slow, after all: a child will thus learn, without appreciable labour, from two to three thousand words in the course of a year; in other words, he will learn *to read*, for the mastery of this number of words will carry him with comfort through most of the books that fall in his way.

Ordinary Method.--Now, compare the steady progress and constant interest and liveliness of such lessons with the deadly weariness of the ordinary reading lesson. The child blunders through a page or two in a dreary monotone without expression, with imperfect enunciation. He comes to a word he does not know, and he spells it; that throws no light on the subject, and he is told the word: he repeats it, but as he has made no mental effort to secure the word, the next time he meets with it the same process is gone through. The reading lesson for that day comes to an end. The pupil has been miserably bored, and has not acquired one new word. Eventually, he learns to read, somehow, by mere dint of repetition; but consider what an abuse of his intelligence is a system of teaching which makes him undergo daily labour with little or no result, and gives him a distaste for books before he has learned to use them.

V.--The First Reading Lesson

[It is so important that children should be taught to read in a rational way, that I introduce two papers--by the writer--which have appeared in *Parents' Review*, in the hope that they will make the suggested method fairly clear & familiar.]

(Two Mothers Confer)

"You don't mean to say you would go plump into words of three or four syllables before a child knows his letters?"

"It is possible to read words without knowing the alphabet, as you know a face without singling out its features; but we learn not only the names but the sounds of the letters before we begin to read words."

"Our children learn their letters without any teaching. We always keep by us a shallow table drawer, the bottom covered half an inch deep with sand. Before they are two, the babies make round *O* and crooked *S*, and *T* for Tommy, and so on, with dumpy, uncertain little fingers. The elder children teach the little ones by way of a game."

"The sand is capital! We have various devices, but none so good as that. Children love to be doing. The funny, shaky lines the little finger makes in the sand will be ten times as interesting as the shapes the eye sees."

"But the reading! I can't get over three syllables in the first lesson. Why, it's like teaching a twelve-months old child to waltz."

"You say that because we forget that a group of letters is no more than the *sign* of a word, while a word is only the vocal sign of a thing or an act. This is how the child learns. First, he gets the notion of the table; he sees several tables; he finds they have legs, by which you can scramble up; very often covers which you may pull off; and on them many things lie, good and pleasant for a baby to enjoy; sometimes, too, you can pull these things off the table, and they go down with a bang, which is nice. The grown-up people call this pleasant thing, full of many interests, 'table,' and, by-and-by, baby says 'table' too; and the word 'table' comes to mean, in a vague way, all this to him. 'Around table,' 'on the table,' and so on, form part of the idea of 'table' to him. In the same way baby chimes in when his mother sings. She says, 'Baby, sing,' and, by-and-by, notions of 'sing,' 'kiss,' 'love,' dawn on his brain."

"Yes, the darlings! and it's surprising how many words a child knows even before he can speak them; 'pussy,' 'dolly,' 'carriage,' soon convey interesting ideas to him."

"That's just it. Interest the child in the thing, and he soon learns the *sound-sign* for it--that is, its name. Now, I maintain that, when he is a little older, he should learn the *form-sign*--that is, the printed word--on the same principle. It is far easier for a child to read plum-pudding than to read 'to, to,' because 'plum-pudding' conveys a far more interesting idea."

"That may be, but when he gets into words of three or four syllables; but what would you do while he's in words of one syllable--indeed, of two or three letters?"

"I should never put him into words of one syllable at all. The bigger the word, the more striking the look of it, and, therefore, the easier it is to read, provided always that the idea it conveys is interesting to a child. It is sad to see an intelligent child toiling over a reading lesson infinitely below his capacity--*ath, eth, ith, oth, uth*--or, at the very best, 'The cat sat on the mat.' How should we like to begin to read German, for example, by toiling over all conceivable combinations of letters, arranged on no principle but similarity of sound; or, worse still, that our readings should be graduated according to the number of letters each word contains? We should be lost in a hopeless fog before a page of words of three letters all drearily like one another, with no distinctive features for the eye to seize upon; but the child? 'oh, well--children are different; no doubt it is good for the child to grind in this mill!' But this is only one of many ways in which children are needlessly and cruelly oppressed!"

"You are taking high moral ground! All the same, I don't think I am convinced. It is far easier for a child to spell cat, cat, than to spell plum-pudding, plum-pudding."

"But spelling and reading are *two* things. You must learn to spell in order to *write* words, not to *read* them. A child is droning over a reading-lesson, spells c o u g h; you say 'cough,' and she repeats. By dint of repetition, she learns at last to associate the look of the word with the sound, and says 'cough' without spelling it; and you think she has arrived at 'cough' through c o u g h. Not a bit of it; c o f spells cough!"

"Yes; but 'cough' has a silent *u*, and a *gh* with the sound of *f*. There, I grant, is a great difficulty. If only there were no silent letters, and if all letters had always the same sound, we should, indeed, have reading made easy. The phonetic people have something to say for themselves."

"You would agree with the writer of an article in a number of a leading review: 'Plough ought to be written and printed *plow*; through, *thru*; enough, *enuf*; ought, *aut* or *ort*'; and so on. All this goes on the mistaken idea that in reading we look at the letters which compose a word, think of their sounds, combine these, and form the word. We do nothing of the kind; we accept a word, written or printed, simply as the *symbol* of a word we are accustomed to say. If the word is new to us we may try to make something of the letters, but we know so well that this is a shot in the dark, that we are careful not to say the new word until we have heard someone else say it."

"Yes, but children are different."

"Children are the same, 'only more so.' We could, if we liked, break up a word into its sounds, or put certain sounds together to make a word. But these are efforts beyond the range of children. First, as last, they learn to know a word by the look of it, and the more striking it looks the easier it is to recognise; provided always that the printed word is one which they already know very well by sound and by sense."

"It is not clear yet; suppose you tell me, step by step, how you would give your first reading lesson. An illustration helps so much."

"Very well: Bobbie had his first lesson yesterday--on his sixth birthday. The lesson was part of the celebration. By the way, I think it's rather a good idea to begin a new study with a child on his birthday, or some great day; he *begins* by thinking the new study a privilege."

"That is a hit. But go on; did Bobbie know his letters?"

"Yes, he had picked them up, as you say; but I had been careful not to allow any small readings. You know how Susanna Wesley used to retire to her room with the child who was to have his first reading-lesson, and not to appear again for some hours, when the boy came out able to read a good part of the first chapter of Genesis? Well, Bobbie's first reading-lesson was a solemn occasion, too, for which we had been preparing for a week or two. First, I bought a dozen penny copies of the 'History of Cock Robin'--good bold type, bad pictures, that we cut out.

Then we had a nursery pasting day--pasting the sheets on common drawing-paper, six one side down, and six the other; so that now we had six complete copies, and not twelve.

Then we cut up the *first page only*, of all six copies, line by line, and word by word. We gathered up the words and put them in a box, and our preparations were complete.

Now for the lesson. Bobbie and I are shut in by ourselves in the morning room. I always use a black-board in teaching the children. I write up, in good clear 'print' hand,

Cock Robin

Bobbie watches with more interest because he knows his letters. I say, pointing to the word, 'cock robin,' which he repeats.

"Then the words in the box are scattered on the table, and he finds half a dozen 'cock robins' with great ease.

We do the same thing with 'sparrow,' 'arrow,' 'said,' 'killed,' 'who,' and so on, till all the words in the verse have been learned. The words on the black-board grow into a column, which Bob reads backwards and forwards, and every way, except as the words run in the verse.

Then Bobbie arranges the loose words into columns like that on the board.

Then into columns of his own devising, which he reads off.

Lastly, culminating joy (the whole lesson has been a delight!), he finds among the loose words, at my dictation,

**'Who killed Cock Robin
I said the sparrow
With my bow and arrow
I killed Cock Robin,'**

Arranging the words in verse form.

Then I had still one un mutilated copy, out of which Bob had the pleasure of reading the verse, and he read it *forwards and backwards*. So long as he lives he will know those twelve words."

"No doubt it was a pleasant lesson; but, think of all the pasting and cutting!"

"Yes, that is troublesome. I wish some publisher would provide us with what we want--nursery rhymes, in good bold type, with boxes of loose words to match, a separate box, or division, for each page, so that the child may not be confused by having too many words to hunt amongst. The point is that he should *see*, and *look* at, the new word many times, so that its shape becomes impressed upon his brain."

"I see; but he is only able to read 'Cock Robin'; he has no general power of reading."

"On the contrary, he will read those twelve words wherever he meets with them. Suppose he learns ten words a day, in half a year he will have at least six hundred words; he will know how to read a little."

"Excellent, supposing your children *remember* all they learn. At the end of a week, mine would remember 'Cock Robin,' perhaps, but the rest would be gone!"

"Oh, but we keep what we get! When we have mastered the words of the second verse, Bob runs through the first in the book, naming words here and there as I point to them. It takes less than a minute, and the ground is secured."

"The first lesson must have been long?"

"I'm sorry to say it lasted half an hour. The child's interest tempted me to do more than I should."

"It all sounds very attractive--a sort of game--but I cannot be satisfied that a child should learn to read without knowing the powers of the letters. You constantly see a child spell a word over to himself, and then pronounce it; the more so, if he has been carefully taught the sounds of the letters--not merely their names."

"Naturally; for though many of our English words are each a law unto itself, others offer a key to a whole group, as *arrow* gives us *sp arrow*, *m arrow*, *h arrow*; but we have alternate days--one for reading, the other for word-building--and that is one way to secure variety, and, so, the joyous interest which is the real secret of success."

VI--Reading By Sight And Sound

Learning to read is Hard Work.--Probably that vague whole which we call 'Education' offers no more difficult and repellent task than that to which every little child is (or ought to be) set down--the task of learning to read. We realise the labour of it when some grown man makes a heroic effort to remedy shameful ignorance, but we forget how contrary to Nature it is for a little child to occupy himself with dreary hieroglyphics--all so dreadfully alike!--when the world is teeming with interesting objects which he is agog to know. But we cannot excuse our volatile Tommy, nor is it good for him that we should. It is quite necessary he should know how to read; and not only so--the discipline of the task is altogether wholesome for the little man. At the same time, let us recognise that learning to read is to many children hard work, and let us do what we can to make the task easy and inviting.

Knowledge of Arbitrary Symbols--In the first place, let us bear in mind that reading is not a science nor an art. Even if it were, the children must still be the first consideration with the educator; but it is not. Learning to read is no more than picking up, how we can, a knowledge of certain arbitrary symbols for objects and ideas. There are absolutely no right and necessary 'steps' to reading, each of which leads to the next; there is no true beginning, middle, or end. For the arbitrary symbols we must know in order to read are not *letters*, but *words*. By way of illustration, consider the delicate differences of sound represented by the letter 'o' in the last sentence; to analyse and classify the sounds of 'o' in 'for,' 'symbols,' 'know,' 'order,' 'to,' 'not,' and 'words,' is a curious, not especially useful, study for a philologist, but a laborious and inappropriate one for a child. It is time we faced the fact that the letters which compose an English word are full of philological interest, and that their study will be a valuable part of education by-and-by; but meantime, sound and letter-sign are so loosely wedded in English, that to base the teaching of reading on the sounds of the letters only, is to lay up for the child much analytic labour, much mental

confusion, due to the irregularities of the language; and some little moral strain in making the sound of a letter in a given word fall under any of the 'sounds' he has been taught.

Definitely, what is it we propose in teaching a child to read? (a) that he shall know at sight, say, some thousand words; (b) That he shall be able to build up new words with the elements of these. Let him learn ten new words a day, and in twenty weeks he will be to some extent able to read, without any question as to the number of letters in a word. For the second, and less important, part of our task, the child must know the sounds of the letters, and acquire power to throw given sounds into new combinations.

What we want is a bridge between the child's natural interests and those arbitrary symbols with which he must become acquainted, and which, as we have seen, are words, and not letters.

These Symbols should be Interesting.--The child cares for things, not words; his analytic power is very small, his observing faculty is exceedingly quick and keen; nothing is too small for him; he will spy out the eye of a fly; nothing is too intricate, he delights in puzzles. But the thing he learns to know by looking at it, is a thing which interests him. Here we have the key to reading. No meaningless combinations of letters, no *cla, cle, cli, clo, clu, no ath, eth, ith, oth, uth*, should be presented to him. The child should be taught from the first to regard the printed word as he already regards the spoken word, as the symbol of fact or idea of full of interest. How easy to read 'robin redbreast,' 'buttercups and daisies'; the number of letters in the words is no matter; the words themselves convey such interesting ideas that the general form and look of them fixes itself on the child's brain by the same law of association of ideas which makes it easy to couple the objects with their spoken names. Having got a word fixed on the sure peg of the idea it conveys, the child will use his knowledge of the sounds of the letters to make up other words containing the same elements with great interest. When he knows 'butter' he is quite ready to make 'mutter' by changing the *b* for an *m*.

Tommy's First Lesson--But example is better than precept, and more convincing than the soundest reasoning. This is the sort of reading lesson we have in view. Tommy knows his letters by name and sound, but he knows no more. To-day he is to be launched into the very middle of reading, without any 'steps' at all, because reading is neither an art nor a science, and has, probably, no beginning. Tommy is to learn to read to-day--

**"I like little pussy,
Her coat is so warm" -**

And he is to know those nine words so well that he will be able to read them wherever they may occur henceforth and for evermore.

"Oh, yes," says a reader, "as in the 'Cock Robin' lesson; grant that the principle is sound--and there is much to be said on both sides of that question--but grant it, who in the world could get through all the pasting and cutting and general messing preparatory to the great lesson? No; the method of the books may be only second-best, but ready-made books must do for me. I have no time to make my own apparatus."

I must own that the cutting and pasting was very clumsy, but the lesson served its purpose because it induced a good friend to education [Miss Miller, founder of a Training College at Oxford] to have a delightful 'Little Pussy' box prepared for us, loose words, nice big type, two lines in a bag. Whoso learns "Little Pussy" as it should be learned will know at least one

hundred words--not a bad stock-in-trade for a beginner--all of them good useful words that we want every day. There is one objection; such contractions as 'I'll' are ugly at the best, and I hope that in the word-lessons based upon 'Little Pussy,' pieces will be chosen in which this fault is avoided.

Steps.--And now, we begin. *Material:* Tommy's box of loose letters, the new 'Little Pussy' box, pencil and paper, or much better, blackboard and chalk. We write up in good big print hand 'Pussy.' Tommy watches with interest: he knows the letters, and probably says them as we write. Besides, he is prepared for the great event of his life; he knows he is going to begin to learn to read to-day. But we do not ask anything yet of his previous knowledge. We simply tell him that the word is 'pussy.' Interest at once; he knows the thing, pussy, and the written symbol is pleasant in his eyes because it is associated with an existing idea in his mind. He is told to look at the word 'pussy' until he is sure he would know it again. Then he makes 'pussy' from memory with his own loose letters. Then the little bag containing our two lines in loose words is turned out, and he finds the word 'pussy'; and, lastly, the little sheet with the poem printed on it is shown to him, and he finds 'pussy,' but is not allowed yet to find out the run of the rhyme. 'Coat, little, like, is, her, warm, I, so,' are taught in the same way, in less time than it takes to describe the lesson. When each new word is learned, Tommy makes a column of the old ones, and reads up and down and *cris-cras*, the column on the blackboard.

Reading Sentences--He knows words now, but he cannot yet read sentences. Now for the delight of *reading*. He finds at our dictation, amongst his loose words, 'pussy--is--warm,' places them in 'reading' order, one after the other, and then reads off the sentence. Joy, as of one who has found a new planet! And Tommy has indeed found a new poet. Then, 'her-little-coat-is-warm,' 'Pussy-is-so-little,' 'I-like-pussy,' 'Pussy-is-little-like-her-coat,' and so on through a dozen more little arrangements. If the rhyme can be kept a secret till the whole is worked out, so much the better. To make the verses up with his own loose words will give Tommy such a delicious sense that knowledge is power, as few occasions in after life will afford. Anyway, reading is to him a delight henceforth, and it will require very bad management indeed to make him hate it.

Tommy's Second Lesson.--Tommy promises himself another reading lesson next day, but he has instead a spelling lesson, conducted somewhat in this way:

He makes the word 'coat' with his letters, from memory if he can; if not, with the pattern word. Say 'coat' slowly; give the sound of the *c*. 'Take away *c*, and what have we left?' A little help will get 'oat' from him. How would you make 'boat' (say the word very slowly, bringing out the sound of *b*). He knows the sounds of the letters, and says *b-oat* readily; *fl-oat*, two added sounds, which you lead him to find out; *g-oat*, he will give you the *g*, and find *goat* a charming new word to know; *m-oat*, he easily decides on the sound of *m*; a little talk about *moat*; the other words are too familiar to need explanation. Tommy will, no doubt, offer '*note*' and we must make a clean breast of it and say, 'No, *note* is spelt with other letters'; but what other letters we do not tell him now. Thus he comes to learn incidentally and very gradually that different groups of letters may stand for the same sounds. But we do not ask him to generalise; we only let him have the fact that *n-oat* does not spell the symbol we express by '*note*.' '*Stoat*'--he will be able to give the sounds of the initial letters, and *stoat* again calls for a little talk--another interesting word. He has made a group of words with his letters, and there they are on the black-board in a column, thus

c-oat
m-oat

g-oat
fl-oat
st-oat
b-oat

He reads the column up and down and *cris-cras*; every word has a meaning and carries an idea. Then the loose words he knows are turned out, and we dictate new sentences, which he arranges: 'I-like-her-goat'; 'her-little-stoat-is-warm,' and so on, making the new words with loose letters.

Unknown Words--Now for a new experience. We dictate 'pussy in the boat.' Consternation! Tommy does not know 'in' nor 'the.' 'Put counters for the words you don't know; they may soon come in our lessons,' and Tommy has a desire and a need--that is, an appetite for learning.

Like Combinations have Different Sounds.--We deal with the remaining words in the same way--'little' gives brittle, tittle, skittle: pussy, is, I, and her, give no new words. 'Like' gives mike and pike. 'so' gives no, do (the musical 'do'), and lo! From 'warm' we get arm, harm, charm, barm, alarm; we pronounced warm as arm. Tommy perceives that such a pronunciation is wrong and vulgar, and sees that all these words are sounded like 'arm,' but not one of them like 'warm'--that is, he sees that the same group of letters need not always have the same sound. But we do not ask him to make a note of this new piece of knowledge; we let it grow into him gradually, after many experiences.

By this time he has eighteen new words on the blackboard of which to make sentences with the nine loose words of 'pussy.' Her skittle is little, her charm is brittle, her arm is warm, and so on. But we take care that the sentences make sense. Her goat is brittle, is 'silly,' and not to be thought of at all. Tommy's new words are written in his 'note-book' in print hand, so that he can take stock of his possessions in the way of words.

Moral Training in Reading Lessons--The next day we do the last two lines of the stanza, as at first. These lines afford hardly any material for a spelling lesson, so in our next lesson we go on with the second verse. But our stock of words is growing; we are able, as we go on, to make an almost unlimited number of little sentences. If we have to use counters now and then, why, that only whets our appetite for knowledge. By the time Tommy has worked 'Little Pussy' through he has quite a large stock of words; has considerable power to attack new words with familiar combinations; what is more, he has achieved; he has courage to attack all 'learning,' and has a sense that delightful results are quite within reach. Moreover, he learns to read in a way that affords him some moral training. There is no stumbling, no hesitation from the first, but bright attention and perfect achievement. His reading lesson is a delight, of which he is deprived when he comes to his lesson in a lazy, drawling mood. Perfect enunciation and precision are insisted on, and when he comes to arrange the whole of the little rhyme in his loose words and read it off (most delightful of all the lessons) his reading must be a perfect and finished recitation. [Spirited nursery rhymes form the best material for such reading lessons. A 'Delightful Reading Box' has been issued on similar plan to the 'Pussy' Box, whose one fault is that the verses are a little dull. But this 'Box' should be of great use]. I believe that this is a practical common-sense way to teach reading in English. It may be profitable for the little German child to work through all possibly dreary combinations of letters before he is permitted to have any joy in 'reading,' because wherever these combinations occur they will have the sounds the child has learned laboriously. The fact that English is anomalous as regards the connection between sign and sound, happily exonerates us from enforcing this dreary grind. [It is desirable that 'Tommy'

should not begin to 'read' until his intelligence is equal to the effort required by these lessons. Even then, it may be well to break up one into two, or half a dozen, as he is able to take it].

VII.--Recitation

'The Children's Art'

On this subject I cannot do better than refer the reader to Mr Arthur Burrell's *Recitation*. This book purports to be a handbook for teachers in elementary schools. I wish that it may be very largely used by such teachers, and may also become a family hand-book; though many of the lessons will not be called for in educated homes. There is hardly any 'subject' so educative and so elevating as that which Mr Burrell has happily described as 'The Children's Art.' All children have it in them to recite; it is an imprisoned gift waiting to be delivered, like Ariel from the pine. In this most thoughtful and methodical volume we are possessed of the fit incantations. Use them duly, and out of the woodenness of even the most commonplace child steps forth the child-artist, a delicate sprite, who shall make you laugh and make you weep. Did not the great Sir Walter "sway to and fro, sobbing his fill," to his little 'Pet's' speaking of--

**"For I am sick, and capable of fears,
Oppressed with wrong, and therefore full of fears;
A widow, husbandless, subject to fears;
A woman, naturally born to fears"?**

Marjorie Fleming was, to be sure, a child-genius; but in this book we learn by what carefully graduated steps a child who is not a genius, is not even born of cultivated parents, may be taught the fine art of beautiful and perfect speaking; but that is only the first step in the acquisition of 'The Children's Art.' The child should speak beautiful thoughts so beautifully, with such delicate rendering of each *nuance* of meaning, that he becomes to the listener the interpreter of the author's thought. Now, consider what appreciation, sympathy, power of expression this implies, and you will grant that 'The Children's Art' is, as Steele said of the society of his wife, "a liberal education in itself." It is objected-- 'Children are such parrots! They say a thing as they hear it said; as for troubling themselves to 'appreciate' and 'interpret,' not a bit of it!" Most true of the 'My name is Norval' style of recitation; but throughout this volume the child is led to find the just expression of thought for himself; never is the poor teacher allowed to set a pattern--'say this as I say it.' The ideas are kept well within the child's range, and the expression is his own. He is caught with guile, his very naughtiness is pressed into service, he finds a dozen ways of saying 'I shan't,' is led cunningly up to the point of expressing himself, and--he does it, to his own surprise and delight. The pieces given here for recitation are a treasure-trove of new joys. 'Winken, Blinken, and Nod,' "Miss Lilywhite's Party," and 'The Two Kittens,' would compel any child to recite. Try a single piece over with the author's markings and suggestions, and you will find there is as much difference between the result and ordinary reading aloud as there is in a musical composition played with and without the composer's expression marks. I hope that my readers will train their children in the art of recitation; in the coming days, more even than in our own will it behove every educated man and woman to be able to speak effectively in public; and, in learning to recite you learn to speak.

Memorising.--Recitation and committing to memory are not necessarily the same thing, and it is well to store a child's memory with a good deal of poetry, learnt without labour. Some years ago I chanced to visit a house, the mistress of which had educational notions of

her own, upon which she was bringing up a niece. She presented me with a large foolscap sheet written all over with the titles of poems, some of them long and difficult: *Tintern Abbey*, for example. She told me that her niece could repeat to me any of those poems that I liked to ask for, and that she had never learnt a single verse by heart in her life. The girl did repeat several of the poems on the list, quite beautifully and without hesitation; and then the lady unfolded her secret. She thought she had made a discovery, and I thought so too. She read a poem through to E.; then the next day, while the little girl was making a doll's frock, perhaps, she read it again; once again the next day, while E.'s hair was being brushed. She got in about six or more readings, according to the length of the poem, at odd and unexpected times, and in the end E. could say the poem which she had *not* learned.

I have tried the plan often since, and found it effectual. The child must not try to recollect or to say the verse over to himself, but, as far as may be, present an open mind to receive an impression of interest. Half a dozen repetitions should give children possession of such poems as 'Dolly and Dick,' 'Do you ask what the birds say?' 'Little lamb, who made thee?' and the like. The gains of such a method of learning are, that the edge of the child's enjoyment is not taken off by weariful verse by verse repetitions, and, also, that the habit of making mental images is unconsciously formed.

I remember once discussing this subject with the late Miss Anna Swanwick in some connection with Browning of which I do not recall, but in the course of talk an extremely curious incident transpired. A lady, a niece of Miss Swanwick's, said that after a long illness, during which she had not been allowed to do anything, she read 'Lycidas' through, by way of a first treat to herself as a convalescent. She was surprised to find herself then next day repeating to herself long passages. Then she tried the whole poem and found she could say it off, the result of this single reading, for she had not learned the poem before her illness, nor read it with particular attention. She was much elated by the treasure-trove she had chanced upon, and to test her powers, she read the whole of 'Paradise Lost,' book by book, and with the same result,—she could repeat it book by book after a single reading! She enriched herself by acquiring other treasures during her convalescence; but as health returned, and her mind became preoccupied with many interests, she found she no longer had this astonishing power. It is possible that the disengaged mind of a child is as free to take and as strong to hold beautiful images clothed in beautiful words as was that of this lady during her convalescence. But, let me again say, every effort of the kind, however unconscious, means wear and tear of brain substance. Let the child lie fallow till he is six, and then, in this matter of memorising, as in others, attempt only a little, and let the poems the child learns be simple and within the range of his own thought and imagination. At the same time, when there is so much noble poetry within a child's compass, the pity of it, that he should be allowed to learn twaddle!

VIII--Reading for Older Children

In teaching to read, as in other matters, *c'est le premier pas qui coute*. The child who has been taught to read with care and deliberation until he has mastered the words of a limited vocabulary, usually does the rest for himself. The attention of his teachers should be fixed on two points--that he acquires the *habit* of reading, and that he does not fall into *slipshod habits* of reading.

The Habit of Reading.--The most common and the monstrous defect in the education of the day is that children fail to acquire the habit of reading. Knowledge is conveyed to them by lessons and talk, but the studious habit of using books as a means of interest and delight is not acquired. This habit should be begun early; so soon as the child can read at all, he

should read for himself, and to himself, history, legends, fairy tales, and other suitable matter. He should be trained from the first to think that one reading of any lesson is enough to enable him to narrate what he has read, and will thus get the habit of slow, careful reading, intelligent even when it is silent, because he reads with an eye to the full meaning of every clause.

Reading Aloud.-- He should have practice, too, in reading aloud, for the most part, in the books he is using for his term's work. These should include a good deal of poetry, to accustom him to the delicate rendering of shades of meaning, and especially to make him aware that words are beautiful in themselves, that they are a source of pleasure, and are worthy of our honour; and that a beautiful word deserves to be beautifully said, with a certain roundness of tone and precision of utterance. Quite young children are open to this sort of teaching, conveyed, not in a lesson, but by a word now and then.

Limitation--In this connection the teacher should not trust to setting, as it were, a copy in reading for the children's imitation. They do imitate readily enough, catching tricks of emphasis and action in an amusing way; but these are mere tricks, an aping of intelligence. The child must express what *he* feels to be the author's meaning; and this sort of intelligent reading comes only of the habit of reading with understanding.

Reading to Children--It is a delight to older people to read aloud to children, but this should be only an occasional treat and indulgence, allowed before bedtime, for example. We must remember the natural inertness of a child's mind; give him the habit of being read to, and he will steadily shirk the labour of reading for himself; indeed, we all like to be spoon-fed with our intellectual meat, or we should read and think more for ourselves and be less eager to run after lectures.

Questions on the Subject-Matter--When a child is reading, he should not be teased with questions as to the meaning of what he has read, the signification of this word or that; what is annoying to older people is equally annoying to children. Besides, it is not of the least consequence that they should be able to give the meaning of every word they read. A knowledge of meanings, that is, an ample and correct vocabulary, is only arrived at in one way--by the habit of reading. A child unconsciously gets the meaning of a new word from the context, if not the first time he meets with it, then the second or the third: but he is on the look-out, and will find out for himself the sense of any expression he does not understand. Direct questions on the subject-matter of what a child has read are always a mistake. Let him *narrate* what he has read, or some part of it. He enjoys this sort of consecutive reproduction, but abominates every question in the nature of a riddle. If there must be riddles, let it be his to ask and the teacher's to direct him the answer. Questions that lead to a side issue or to a personal view are allowable because these interest children--'What would you have done in his place?'

Lesson-Books--A child has not begun his education until he has acquired the habit of reading to himself, with interest and pleasure, books fully on a level with his intelligence. I am speaking now of his lesson-books, which are all too apt to be written in a style of insufferable twaddle, probably because they are written by persons who have never chanced to meet a child. All who know children know that they do not talk twaddle and do not like it, and prefer that which appeals to their understanding. Their lesson-books should offer matter for their reading, whether aloud or to themselves; therefore they should be written with literary power. As for the matter of these books, let us remember that children can take in ideas and principles, whether the latter be moral or mechanical, as quickly and clearly as we do ourselves (perhaps more so); but detailed processes, lists and summaries,

blunt the edge of a child's delicate mind. Therefore, the selection of their first lesson-books is a matter of grave importance, because it rests with these to give children the idea that knowledge is supremely attractive and that reading is delightful. Once the habit of reading his lesson-book with delight is set up in a child, his education is--not completed, but--ensured; he will go on for himself in spite of the obstructions which school too commonly throws in his way.

Slipshod Habits; Inattention--I have already spoken of the importance of a single reading. If a child is not able to narrate what he has read once, let him not get the notion that he may, or that he must, read it again. A look of slight regret because there is a gap in his knowledge will convict him. The power of reading with perfect attention will not be gained by the child who is allowed to moon over his lessons. For this reason, reading lessons must be short; ten minutes or a quarter of an hour of fixed attention is enough for children of the ages we have in view, and a lesson of this length will enable a child to cover two or three pages of his book. The same rule as to the length of a lesson applies to children whose lessons are read to them because they are not yet able to read for themselves.

Careless Enunciation--It is important that, when reading aloud, children should make due use of the vocal organs, and, for this reason, a reading lesson should be introduced by two or three simple breathing exercises, as, for a example, a long inspiration with closed lips and a slow expiration with open mouth. If a child read through his nose, it is well to consult a doctor; an operation for adenoids may be necessary, which is rarely distressing, and should be performed while children are young. Provincial pronunciation and slipshod enunciation must be guarded against. Practice in pure vowel sounds, and the respect for words which will not allow of their being hastily slurred over, should cure these defects. By the way, quite little children commonly enunciate beautifully, because a big word is a new acquirement which they delight in and make the most of; our efforts should be directed to make older children hold words in like esteem.

The habit of 'minding your stops' comes of intelligent reading. A child's understanding of the passage will lead him to correct pointing.

Down in a green and shady bed

A modest violet grew

Down in a green and shady bed

A modest violet grew

Down in a green and shady bed

A modest violet grew

Down in a green and shady bed

A modest violet grew

Down in a green and shady bed

A modest violet grew

Down in a green and shady bed

A modest violet grew

Its stalk was bent it hung its head

As if to hide from view

Its stalk was bent it hung its head

As if to hide from view

Its stalk was bent it hung its head

As if to hide from view

Its stalk was bent it hung its head

As if to hide from view

Its stalk was bent it hung its head

As if to hide from view

Its stalk was bent it hung its head

As if to hide from view

Its stalk was bent it hung its head

As if to hide from view

And yet it was a lovely flower

Its colour bright and fair

And yet it was a lovely flower

Its colour bright and fair

And yet it was a lovely flower

Its colour bright and fair

And yet it was a lovely flower

Its colour bright and fair

And yet it was a lovely flower

Its colour bright and fair

And yet it was a lovely flower

Its colour bright and fair

And yet it was a lovely flower

Its colour bright and fair

It might have graced a rosy bower

Instead of hiding there

It might have graced a rosy bower

Instead of hiding there

It might have graced a rosy bower

Instead of hiding there

It might have graced a rosy bower

Instead of hiding there

It might have graced a rosy bower

Instead of hiding there

It might have graced a rosy bower

Instead of hiding there

It might have graced a rosy bower

Instead of hiding there

Yet thus it was content to bloom

In modest tints arrayed

Yet thus it was content to bloom

In modest tints arrayed

Yet thus it was content to bloom

In modest tints arrayed

Yet thus it was content to bloom

In modest tints arrayed

Yet thus it was content to bloom

In modest tints arrayed

Yet thus it was content to bloom

In modest tints arrayed

Yet thus it was content to bloom

In modest tints arrayed

And there diffused a sweet
perfume

Within the silent shade

And there diffused a sweet
perfume

Within the silent shade

And there diffused a sweet
perfume

Within the silent shade And there
diffused a sweet perfume

Within the silent shade And there
diffused a sweet perfume

Within the silent shade And there
diffused a sweet perfume

Within the silent shade And there
diffused a sweet perfume

Within the silent shade And there
diffused a sweet perfume

Within the silent shade

Then let me to the valley go

This pretty flower to see

That I may also learn to grow

Then let me to the valley go

This pretty flower to see

That I may also learn to grow

Then let me to the valley go

This pretty flower to see

That I may also learn to grow

Then let me to the valley go

This pretty flower to see

That I may also learn to grow

Then let me to the valley go

This pretty flower to see

That I may also learn to grow

Then let me to the valley go

This pretty flower to see

That I may also learn to grow

Then let me to the valley go

This pretty flower to see

That I may also learn to grow

In sweet humility

In sweet humility

In sweet humility

In sweet humility

In sweet humility

In sweet humility