

OPEN LETTERS.

Longfellow on International Copyright.

FROM A LETTER TO MR. WILLIAM DULLES, JR., DATED OCTOBER 8, 1878.

* * * Whatever is just, is
 for the benefit of all; and I
 wish we could have a Law
 providing, between England
 and America, that "a Copy-
 right taken out in either
 country shall be equally
 valid in both." * * *

Yours very truly
 Henry W. Longfellow.

The Public-School Problem.

THE statement is made editorially by THE CENTURY, "We need [in our public schools] less ambition and more thoroughness; less of the *what* and more of the *why*," and the question is asked, "Who is to teach the American people this?" My answer is, that a large part of the people are already convinced of it. If the genuine evils of the present system can be shown still more plainly and a remedy for them suggested, surely the progressive American spirit may be trusted to apply it.

One of the best instructors in the country asserts that "in no work to-day is there so much quackery as in the so-called educational work of the schools."

Of what is the public-school system accused? As Herbert Spencer forcibly states it, "The wrong things are taught at the wrong time and in the wrong way." Whether this sweeping assertion is entirely true or not, it is certainly true that our schools teach too many things at the same time, even if — which is not the case — every one of them was taught as it should be.

There is no time given in our schools to the development of a strong and symmetrical body; no time to allow the reasoning faculties to draw the breath of

life; no time for anything but to crowd the memory with facts, the *why* of them all being as utterly unknown to the pupil as it is to the wooden desk upon which he piles his many books.

There is no need to argue the statement that the health of many children suffers in this process of holding the metaphorical nose and pouring instruction down the metaphorical throat. Why should the word of the majority of parents, teachers, and physicians be doubted? Because a child does not drop dead or have a fit on the spot, it does not follow that he is uninjured. Even ignoring all physical evils resulting from this cause, what vast and dreadful mental damage is done him by the starvation of his reasoning faculties in proportion to the stuffing of his memory, by requiring him to grapple with many subjects, some beyond his intellectual strength, and even, under such circumstances, to do the work of a year in six months' time!

Teachers are not responsible for this state of things. They are, in common with their pupils, the victims of this great crime — "the assassination of intellect." Teachers work for wages as do the other laboring classes of the community, and in this special pro-

fession the supply is always in excess of the demand. The overworked and discouraged teacher has her choice of evils,—to resign her position and with it her bread and butter, or to keep it and make the best of a bad matter.

The remedy for this condition of affairs lies in the creation of a public sentiment against the universal and destructive "cramming" process. Let a strong public sentiment demand a reform in this matter, and the reform will follow as surely as the earth will continue to revolve upon its axis.

The courses of study for our public schools and the amount of time to be given to each branch are planned by committees, trustees, and boards of education. Generally they are the most influential and honored men of the community. They spend gratuitously much time and labor in the interests of the schools. But it is not enough that they should be moral and "well-meaning" men. They should comprehend the duties required and possess the necessary sort of ability for their performance. The overseers of these great mental mills should at least be as familiar with their workings, and as good judges of the quality of the material produced, as the foreman of a woolen factory would be. It is a stupid and illogical procedure to elect to such positions men who, though they may be skillful manufacturers or successful merchants, know little or nothing of the laws of mental development, and possess no practical knowledge of school-room work.

Caroline B. Le Row.

Mind Training.

IS IT not plain, in order that the student of average ability shall obtain the power and intelligence that is expected, in view of her so-called advantages, that either the years spent at school must be extended, or some more efficient methods of acquiring knowledge must be employed? As to the former, every teacher of private schools knows that no more time will be allowed. The years granted to the school-girl are grudgingly given, and often from these much time is pilfered by social distractions.

Persuaded that some *direct means* must be found for the development of more intelligent and efficient working power, and aided by the observation and experience gained in contact with the minds of nearly two thousand pupils, I was led to conclude that the power our pupils need lies in *the ability to concentrate the attention*. Then arose the question, How may the powers of perception and of concentration be gained at school, and made to become habits of the mind? Plainly, in no other way than by regular and systematic training to this end. Then was formulated a variety of exercises, to be practiced by the pupils from ten to twenty minutes each day, with no effort at learning or memorizing, although these would be attained, but solely to the end of acquiring the power of attention.

To insure *quickness and accuracy in seeing*, the reversible blackboard may be made a valuable auxiliary. A collection of figures, groups of circles or marks for unconscious counting, lists of words, and long sentences may each be presented for an instant, and the pupils be required to write or to repeat precisely what they have seen.

These exercises, it must be understood, are as distinct and apart from the work of learning lessons as are gymnastic exercises from the habits which follow their use, and, like such physical exercises, are to be considered only as means to an end.

Various and multiform are the means to which the awakened teacher may resort to quicken the minds of her pupils, and to obtain that all-important result of attention—accuracy in seeing and hearing. One of the most renowned of French educators was accustomed to require the boys under his charge to run with all speed past the shop windows of the streets, and on returning to write the names of all the articles exposed to view. It has been proved that the power to concentrate the attention may be cultivated and strengthened to such a degree, the mind becoming more and more obedient to the will, that pupils thus prepared are able to learn lessons, within their comprehension, in less than one-half of the time formerly required.

I venture to assert that a very large part of the time spent in studying lessons in school and at home is wasted for lack of early training to habits of perception and attention.

Instead of vexing the mind of the delinquent with persistent questioning, for the mere sake of "hearing the lesson," an endeavor as hopeless as that of trying to pump water from an empty cistern, let the teacher first make clear the meaning of the lesson, emphasizing with marked distinctness the principal points; this done, require the learner either to write or to repeat the precise words, or words of the same meaning, which she has just heard. This requirement, be it understood, is not for the sake of committing the words to memory, but is a means of holding the pupil's entire attention until she has full possession of the lesson to be learned. To know that the results must be produced at once will stimulate the dullest mind to its full measure of activity, and in the effort to recall the exact meaning, and the corresponding words, all other issues must be laid aside: the teacher is calling her to a quick account, and there is no escape.

The teacher will find it expedient to set apart, each day, short periods of time, varying in length from ten to twenty minutes, according to the age of her pupils, for the single purpose of developing and strengthening those faculties which will, at last, enable them to study, according to the true meaning of the word.

In order to show how much may be accomplished by training the mind to *accuracy in hearing*, when the power of attention has been acquired, some examples, by way of results, are here given. In my school were assembled about forty girls from fourteen to eighteen years of age. A poem by Wordsworth, consisting of twenty-four lines, was perfectly recited by the entire class in seven minutes; the teacher, as is her invariable rule, read each verse once only. An extract of seventeen lines from one of Charles Lamb's stories was accurately repeated after nine minutes. Twenty-one lines read from Washington Irving's "Sketch Book" were instantly reproduced without an error.

A part of the description of the battle of Waterloo by Victor Hugo was read aloud once, and the listeners immediately recalled thirty-six lines, or four hundred and sixteen words, precisely as they had heard them; and this was done without the least mental strain. The power had been acquired by a slow and

systematic process of training, lasting but a few minutes at once.

Many specimens of good literature have been learned in a minute portion of the time which would be found necessary to the untrained student.

It is undeniably true that the mind retains longest that to which it gives the closest attention; therefore, it need be no matter of astonishment that the pupils are able to recall selections, or lessons, thus learned, after months or even years have passed.

Classes in history, literature, and art have been conducted with little use of text-books. There have been readings, lectures, and familiar talks on the part of the teacher, the oral method having been found to impart more of the substance to be learned than the pupil could gain from the mere study of the book. Many examples might be given proving the efficacy of a system which strives to develop to the fullest extent, in each individual, the power of attention and concentration.

With this important part of the mental machinery in efficient working condition, the judicious teacher, ever watchful of the physical welfare of the youth intrusted to her care, will gladly dispense with many brain-wearying hours for her pupils, and will rejoice in being able to afford them sufficient time for play and physical development. She will not insist upon a verbal recitation, in order that she may "hear a lesson," but will require of the scholars an oral or written account of what has been learned in listening to her instructions, and as the result of their own research and observation.

In a school where the pupils are daily exercised to the end of securing habits of attention, much time will be economized, more instruction will be imparted, fewer text-books will be used, a clearer and broader intelligence will be secured, by direct contact with the teacher's mind; and last, but by no means least, a truer sympathy will exist between teacher and pupil.

Catharine Aiken.

The Education of the Blind.

A REPLY.

It is in no spirit of controversy, but from a feeling that the schools and institutions for the blind are placed in a false light, that I enter a protest against certain sentiments expressed in the "Open Letter" entitled "The Blind as Students," in the November *CENTURY*.

After the faint praise of the opening sentence we are told that the schools "are fearfully one-sided in their training, lamentably limited in their scope." First, let us see what their scope is. That of one, according to the words of the director, taken from its prospectus, is, "in all cases to fit them [the pupils] for usefulness in life, and for maintaining themselves, if necessary, by their own efforts"; of another, "to furnish to the blind children of the State the best known facilities for acquiring a thorough education, and to train them in some useful profession or manual art, by which they may be enabled to contribute to their own support after leaving the institution." There seems to be nothing "lamentably limited" thus far, and these are but specimens of many which might be cited.

Just what is meant by their being "fearfully one-

sided in their training" is not made very clear. They are charged with conducting to "blindisms," such as "snapping the fingers to indicate the position of the extended hand when about to exchange a friendly greeting or pass an object." How it may have been in time past I am unable to say, but in an experience of three years' teaching, and having witnessed their greetings and hand-shakings scores of times, I have never yet noticed the "snapping of fingers," nor until the perusal of Mr. Perry's letter had I heard of such an expedient. On the other hand, however, I have known cases where pupils have come to the school with "blindisms" acquired at home, such as moving the body and making grotesque motions with the hands and arms, which gradually disappeared under the timely and friendly admonitions of teachers and the influence of their new companions, many of whom have gone through the same experience and are on the lookout for these peculiarities in new-comers.

It is true that not all is accomplished that might be wished, but the same is true of the public schools. The course of study pursued in the schools for the blind with which I am acquainted is at least equal to that up to and including the ordinary high school.

Last year a lady, known as a lecturer in an adjoining State, visited a class of blind in algebra. After listening to the recitation, which consisted in solving problems of two and three unknown quantities, from books printed in the ordinary raised type, the time spent in the learning of which Mr. Perry considers "wholly wasted," she told them that they recited as well as any seeing scholars she ever heard. A young man from the same school last year entered a theological seminary, passing the required examination without a single "condition," while several other candidates, some of whom were college graduates, were "conditioned" on two or more subjects. I give these merely as examples of what the institutions are doing educationally. I would not discourage the education of the blind in the public schools, as the writer recommends, if it were practicable. But we must take the facts as they are, and as the case now stands it is unquestionably impracticable. Of this, however, it is not my purpose now to speak.

We are told that our methods are "slow and clumsy." It is only fair to judge of the methods by the results. The young man referred to was congratulated upon his successful examination by a seeing classmate, who said, "If my college had done for me what your little school has for you, I should be satisfied." It is further objected that "the competition at such institutions is always and in every department only with those hampered by a like disadvantage," and that the pupil "needs the constant spur to his pride of seeing those about him accomplishing more in less time, to stimulate his ambition." What stimulus can there be to the ambition of a pupil capable of learning a lesson from one or two readings, in surrounding him with children who, "with fingers crammed into their ears, buzz over a lesson of three pages for the fifteenth time"?

The efficiency of wooden maps and globes in teaching geography is admitted; but "an excellent substitute may be furnished by any friend at home who will carefully trace the outlines of maps in a common atlas." "Whatever these contrivances lack, the native ingenuity and aptitude of the pupil must supply." This is