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DR. WILLIAM A. ALCOTT.

WILLIAM A. ALCOTT, one of the pioneers in the reformation of common schools in New England, and an indefatigable laborer by pen and voice in the cause of popular education, especially in physiology and hygiene, was born in Wolcott, Connecticut, on the 6th of August, 1798. His father was a hard working farmer, in moderate circumstances, in a poor farming town; and his mother a woman of intelligence and practical good sense, having been a teacher in early life. She inspired her son with a love of personal improvement, and a desire to serve others. His opportunities for instruction were confined to the "District School as it was," for three or four months in the summer, and four months in the winter, until he was eight years old; and during the winter term for four or five years afterward. The staple of a common school education was spelling, reading and writing. Arithmetic was not taught except to the older boys in the evening, and a little geography, gathered from reading Nathaniel Dwight's "Questions and Answers." Young Alcott, however, enjoyed the privilege of home instruction in the rudiments of arithmetic; and at school, of being employed as monitor, and also of being called on to give assistance to his schoolmates out of school hours. But in addition to these opportunities, he attended a school kept by the minister of the parish for six months, where he acquired a little knowledge of grammar, geography and composition; and where too he enjoyed the still greater advantage of learning by teaching others; thus making his knowledge more accurate, and confirming at the same time the habit of doing good to others,—which finally became the master passion and habit of his life. He was not fond of the boyish sports and exercises of those days,—eschewing angling and trapping as cruel, and preferring books and conversation at home, to wrestling, ball playing and jumping.

But books were exceedingly scarce. The catalogue of many a family library in his native neighborhood would at this day be a literary curiosity. His father's, which was far from being the most meager, consisted mainly of the Bible, the Book of Knowledge, Cynthia, Francis Spira, George Buchanan the King's Jester, and John R. Jewett's adventures among the Indians.

His mother, however, who had seen a better class of books, was accustomed, while he was employed, during the long winter evenings, in paring apples, knitting and other domestic occupations, to relate to him their contents; in some instances giving a very full account of a valuable book. His unbounded thirst to know, she thus in some measure kept alive for future better opportunities.

When he had read many times over the books already mentioned, he began to borrow of the neighbors. Whatever could be obtained for several miles round, he eagerly devoured, without much discrimination. It happened, however, that most of the books he borrowed were negatively good, and some of them excellent. Such books as *The Saracen*, *Pamela*, *Sir Charles Grandison*, *Clariſſa Harlow*, *Stephen Burroughs*, *Paul and Virginia*, and *Robinson Crusoe*, were among the worst; while *Stiles' Judges of Charles L.*, *Life of Franklin*, *Murray's Power of Religion on the Mind*, *Pope's Essay on Man*, *Milton's Paradise Lost*, *Young's Night Thoughts*, *Geſner's Death of Abel*, *Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress*, *Vicar of Wakefield*, and *Burgh's Dignity of Human Nature*, especially the last, had a better influence upon him. Chance also threw in his way a work on electricity, *Blair's Moral Philosophy*, and *Trumbull's History of Indian Wars*, of which his hungry and thirsty mind made the most.

There were indeed the fragments of an old library in the place, but many years elapsed before he could get access to it; and when, at the age of fourteen, he obtained a right to it, he found fewer books congenial to his taste than he had expected. *Doddridge's Rise and Progress*, *Fuller's Gospel its own witness*, *Neal's History of the Puritans*, *Trumbull's History of Connecticut*, *The Life of Mohammed*, *Josephus' History of the Jews*, and *Rollins' Ancient History*, were among the best; and some of them exerted a most marked and decided influence upon his character.

He read slowly, and frequently with pen in hand; and some of his notes, still in existence, form considerable volumes. Rare books, which he borrowed, he sometimes copied entire. Still, he generally read for amusement. The idea of self-education and self-advancement had as yet dawned but indistinctly on his mind; although he was unconsciously, but therefore the more surely, educating himself. From one book, however,—*Rollins' History*,—he extracted something beyond amusement. All the leisure time he could find, amid five months of active farm labor, was devoted to the careful perusal of this work; and he seems never to have forgotten it.

At this early period he became fond of versifying; an occupation of uncertain value. Some of his friends, from weakness or thoughtlessness,

encouraged it. But he did not long waste his time in this way; he gradually substituted for it the more valuable habit of letter writing.

As yet there had been no post-office in his native town, and therefore little communication with the surrounding world. In a population of nearly two hundred families, not twenty, perhaps not a dozen, had ever so much as taken a newspaper of any kind. By saving his spending money from time to time, he was at length able for one quarter,—perhaps for a whole half year,—in company with a young friend, to take a weekly newspaper. •

In this state of things he attempted to form a juvenile library. A constitution and set of by-laws were prepared with much wisdom; and he was made the librarian. Of seven youths, mostly about fourteen or fifteen years of age, who signed the constitution, only three ever paid the first installment. There was no parental encouragement, even in good words. A small volume entitled *Cotemporary Biography*, was purchased with the fifty cents which had been raised, and thoroughly read, after which they all sold out their rights to the librarian; and thus ended this first attempt at educational improvement.

The habit of epistolary correspondence became almost a pastime with him, as it still is. A regular and frequent and sometimes profitable correspondence with one young friend was begun as early as the age of twelve years, and continued for twenty years or more; and had no little influence in the formation of his general character.

His great aim all this while was to be a printer. Various other employments had indeed been mentioned by his friends. One aged grandmother, with whom he was a favorite, preferred to have him educated to be a minister. Another as strenuously maintained that he ought to be a physician. His own parents said nothing; partly doubtless, from modesty, and partly from poverty.

The young man himself could see no way of ever becoming a printer; yet his attachment to the employment was so strong that he could not willingly give up the idea of one day reaching it. He continued to labor indeed, with great faithfulness, (though he was sometimes a little absent minded,) because he believed it to be his duty. The idea of becoming a teacher or an author was far from his thoughts.

He was little more than eighteen years of age, when application was made to his father to permit his son to keep the school in his native district. The school house stood but a few rods from his father's dwelling, and six hours in school would leave him several hours for labor; besides the sum of ten dollars a month, even though he furnished his own board, looked very tempting. He at length consented to take the school for three months.

His success this winter was limited in two ways. 1. His discipline was harsh and severe; not so much from natural inclination, as he was by nature mild and forbearing, but in the belief that sternness and a kind of martial discipline were indispensable. 2. His heart was too much divided between his labor in the school and that for his father, which consumed nearly every moment out of school, not occupied in sleep. Nevertheless, he had some merit as a teacher, and his reputation went abroad.

For six successive winters, with the single interruption of one year, (when he went South to teach,) he continued to be employed in different parts of Hartford and Litchfield counties, with a gradually increasing compensation. By a few he was valued, because they thought him a smart master, who would make the pupils know their places; by others, for his reputation as a scholar; and by others still, because he was valued highly by the children. It was in those days very much, in essence, as it is now: parents would not visit the schools where their children were if they could help it; and what they knew about the school they had to take at second hand.

Two things he certainly did as a teacher; he labored incessantly, both "in season and out of season." No man was ever more punctual or more faithful to his employers. And then he governed his school with that sort of martial law which secured a silence, that in the common schools of his native region had been little known. This procured for him one species of reputation that extended far and wide, so that his services were by a particular class much sought for. It was his boast, as it was that of part of his friends and pupils, that at almost any moment during school hours—such was the stillness—a pin falling to the floor might be heard distinctly. But it was a silence which was obtained at a very great—almost too great—sacrifice.

The following anecdotes will serve as an illustration of the point. One of his pupils was to be punished with the rod. Great preparation was made, and the scholars in general were "put in fear," as was the teacher's intention.

The flagellation, though not remarkably severe, was performed with a stick somewhat brittle at the end, a piece of which broke off, and struck the cheek of another boy, and raised a little blood. The pupils carried home the report. Some weeks afterward, the teacher was surprised to learn that a complaint had been entered against him to the grand jury of the town, by the guardians of the boy whose cheek had been hurt, and that he was in danger of a prosecution. The complaint, however, was taken very little notice of, and the affair

died away. Good order had been secured in school, and all appeared to be going on well; and it was probably deemed unwise to interfere. The whole affair, however, was known abroad, and somewhat injured him.

His popularity was also diminished by the stand he took against public exhibitions, or quarter days as they were called. For though almost everybody spoke well of the change, and preferred, as they said, the new custom of keeping the door always open to visitors, for every day of the week, yet it was easy to see that the plan was regarded as an innovation upon ancient usages. Nobody visited the school now; and the teacher and his pupils were entirely alone, at least nineteen days out of twenty, the whole term.

During the last of these six years of teaching, which was 1821, he had been made an executive officer of his native town, and he endeavored to fulfill the trust reposed in him. But as his school was four or five miles from his field of civil activity, the two kinds of labor did not very well harmonize, and the school sometimes suffered. He had hence been obliged to discontinue his school on a certain occasion, in order to commit to the county prison a common debtor. Anxious to be at his school on the morning of the second day, according to expectation, he traveled in the extreme cold of a January night till nearly morning, and scarcely closed his eyes in sleep during the whole time. The next morning he was in school at the precise hour of nine o'clock; though in order to effect this he had fatigued himself still farther by a long and rapid walk that morning. They who have had a similar experience will not be surprised when they are told that with irritated brain and nerves the school appeared to him more like a bedlam than any thing else. Disappointed in his attempts to secure the wonted silence, he was about to execute vengeance on some of those whom he regarded as the ringleaders, when lo! the injunction of Salzmann, the German educator, to *look for the cause internally*, came to his mind. In himself—his care, fatigue and sleeplessness—he sought for the cause, and in himself he found it!

With all his errors, he was preëminently successful as a teacher; and had been very greatly attached to his employment. He had even begun to cherish the hope of being able one day to teach permanently. And yet there were serious difficulties in the way. His scanty wages, twelve dollars a month, had chiefly gone to aid in the support of his father's family, and he was unable to study his profession, had there been opportunity, for want of the needful funds. Then, too, there was little encouragement to do so, had he possessed the means; since male teachers were seldom employed except for four or

five months of the winter. Indeed it was not usual to continue the schools for more than seven or eight months in the year.

In the spring of 1822, after he had closed his sixth annual winter term of teaching, and at the end of a long search, he found means to obtain a school for one year. It was a new thing in the place, but relying on his fame as a teacher, which had long since reached them, and anxious to obtain his services in the best way they could, and at such time as they could, it was agreed to employ him for the time above-mentioned, including a vacation of one month, at nine dollars a month, or ninety-nine dollars a year and his board. Hitherto, for some time, he had received twelve dollars a month, but here was steady employment. A liberal individual volunteered to add one dollar from his own purse, to make up the sum to \$100, upon which the offer was acceded to, and he began his school early in May. He was now nearly twenty-four years of age. He boarded in the families of his employers, as was the custom of the times. This year, however, he was to traverse the district twice; that is, every six months. As the school was very large, made up from some thirty families or more, his course might have well deserved the usual term of opprobrium,—“begging his bread from door to door.”

But this boarding in the families, to a person of a missionary spirit, has its advantages; and Dr. Alcott endeavored to make the most of it. He soon became, what he had for some time been verging toward, a missionary of education. He spent most of his time while in these families, not in reading, of which, however, he was becoming more and more fond, but in instructing the children by conversation and anecdotes, and incidentally, both directly and indirectly, the parents. His whole heart was in his school, and he endeavored to have theirs strongly turned in the same direction. He threw open his doors and solicited their daily visits. He urged the necessity of reform in many particulars, which, in that district and indeed all over that region, had been till now chiefly overlooked.

One of the first things that he pressed upon the attention of his employers was an improvement of the condition of the school room. Hitherto, for the most part, in Connecticut at least, the seats for the smaller pupils had consisted of a mere plank or slab, usually too high. He did not believe in the usefulness or necessity of suspending any but the most guilty and abandoned between the earth and the heavens. But the proposal to build a few seats with backs was stared at, and by some ridiculed. However, persevering appeals to mothers on the dangerous consequences of deformity in their daughters, from long sitting on these benches, at length prevailed, and a change was effected.

Heating and ventilating came next ; but here he was far less successful. One thing, however, he could and did do. At every recess, in cold or heat, the doors and windows were thrown open, and the pure air of heaven was allowed to sweep through for a few moments.

Yet his largest innovation upon ancient usage, was in methods of instruction, particularly for the youngest pupils. Up to this period, in nine-tenths of the schools, most of the smaller pupils had done little more than "say A, B, and sit on a bench ;" and that, as we have seen, a very indifferent one. As a consequence, those whom Satan found idle he usually employed. Hence many petty school laws, and petty punishments. The idea of employing them in something useful by way of prevention had not occurred to a dozen teachers in all that region.

Blackboards at that time had not been thought of ; but slates were cheap and abundant. Dr. Alcott procured a dozen or two of small size, and one very large one, and a quantity of pencils, and resolved on an experiment.

He would say to his abecedarians sometime after opening school ; Now you have sat so still this long time, that I am going to let you take the slates and and amuse yourselves with them. The small slates and pencils were then distributed, while the large one was either held up by an older pupil, or suspended on a nail where they could all see it.

On this *incipient blackboard*, he had coarsely traced, as a copy for imitation, a house, a tree, a cat, or a dog. They were not slow to follow out his suggestions, and thus to keep themselves, for a time, out of mischief. From the pictures of dogs, birds, cats and other animals, and of houses, trees, &c., they proceeded to making letters, in the printed form, and then to their construction in words, and finally to writing and composition.

But the detail of his innovations, especially in methods of instruction, will hardly be needful to those who have read his "Confessions of a Schoolmaster," written some twenty years afterward, and now of late revised and reprinted. This work reveals a soul struggling with error both internal and external ; though afterward, through good report and through evil, reaching a point of education to which few teachers at that early period ever attained. If its style should be objected to as a little too homespun, yet its plain, straightforward common sense, and its strict adhesion to truth and nature, impart an interest which even now, at this stage of the common school reformation, render it next to the "District School as it was," one of the most suitable books which could be had for the Teacher's library.

So great, indeed, was his enthusiasm and so unreserved his devo-

tion to the cause to which he seemed to be for life devoted, that he could hardly think, converse, or read, on any other subject. It even abridged his hours of sleep, and occasionally deprived him of his usual food. For he often rose before daylight, during the short days of winter, and hastened away to his school room, sometimes a mile or a mile and a half distant, before the family with whom he boarded was up; and occasionally before he had access to even a frugal meal.

If it is asked what he could find to do at the school room for an hour or two before the time of opening the school, the reply is, that in the first place he made his own fires and swept his own floor, and would permit no one else to do it. His maxim, here, in a matter which concerned the happiness of sixty or seventy children, was, "If you want your work well done, do it yourself." This is not mentioned as a thing which should be imitated. The time and energies of the teacher are too valuable. But, in the second place, he had a great deal of preparation to make, copies to be written, lessons to be assigned, &c. Thirdly, he delighted in getting around him a group of children, and telling them stories from day to day, and thus securing their punctual and cheerful attention. Fourthly, there were even at times extra recitations in branches which he was not allowed or expected to permit during the usual formal six hours.

In short—and to repeat—his zeal and labors were as untiring, as they were unheard of before in that region. He would not only labor for his flock in season, but out of season; and as he would himself doubtless now admit, out of *reason* too. For he not only gave up his mornings and evenings to the children or their parents, but he would not even permit himself to *sit* in the school room, for a moment. He was, literally, on his feet from morning till night; and as it was vulgarly expressed by some of his patrons, not only always on his feet, but always "on the jump."

The severity of his self-denials and exertions joined to other causes, especially a feeble and delicate constitution, brought on him, toward the end of summer, a most violent attack of erysipelas, from the effects of which, though he escaped with his life, he never entirely recovered.

At the close of the year for which he had engaged, although the district did not feel able to continue the school any longer by the year, they unanimously engaged him for the unusually long term of six months the ensuing winter, at the price of thirteen dollars per month, or seventy-eight dollars for the term. This was deemed a compensation quite in advance for those times, and was accepted as entirely satisfactory.

Here, then, he was, during the winter of 1823-4, laboring exceedingly hard both in teaching and in discipline; and yet in the end, in both departments, accomplishing his object. It is, however, to be confessed—if he has not himself confessed it—that he resorted occasionally to such measures, in order to secure the desired discipline, as were neither satisfactory to himself, on reflection, nor fully sustained by the public opinion. However, he made his mark, and it was not easily obliterated.

His influence, here, was continued—perhaps increased—by A. B. Alcott, his old friend and kinsman, who became his successor in the pedagogic chair. Within a few years the district in which the last mentioned labors were performed, has, in common with an adjoining district, erected a public school house, which is greatly in advance of any thing of the kind in that part of Connecticut; and at an expense, as it is said, of \$18,000.

During four months of the winter of 1824-5, Dr. Alcott had the care of the central school of Bristol, a district adjoining the scene of his former labors. Here he was useful, but with two or three drawbacks. One was his medical studies; for he was not now boarding around, but in the family of a medical man, to whom he recited. Then, in order to gain time, he restricted himself to four hours sleep, which rendered him more nervous and irritable than formerly; and finally brought on him a fit of sickness, which, though he unexpectedly recovered from it, in some degree impaired his energies, and neutralized his efforts for the whole winter. He did not add to his reputation as a teacher by the efforts of this winter; but rather diminished it.

In studying a new profession, he had no wish or intention to relinquish the profession he had already chosen. But the longer he had taught, the more he had felt his incapacity to the task, and the greater his anxiety to qualify himself if possible, and if not too late, for so responsible an office. And as, on the other hand, there was no Normal School, or Teacher's Seminary to which he could resort, and, on the other, he had not the pecuniary means of pursuing an academic and collegiate course, he not unaptly and unwisely concluded to study medicine as a preparation, indirectly, for the office of educator reserving to himself the privilege, should his health fail, of which there were increasing signs, of practicing medicine as a substitute.

During the winter of 1825-6, he attended a regular course of medical lectures at New Haven, and in the following March received a license to practice medicine and surgery. But his health was far from being good, and he was himself beginning to be more apprehen-

sive than consumptive people usually are, of a fatal result. However he was more determined than ever before, to devote his life, if possible, to the work which Divine Providence seemed to have assigned him.

But he came from the college at a season of the year when it was not customary to employ any but female teachers in the schools; and after some hesitation, he made application, in order not to interrupt his chosen labors, for the central school in his native town, at one dollar and fifty cents a week, and "board round;" that being the usual rate paid to female teachers. This offer, though unexpected and not a little mysterious, was accepted; and in May, 1826, he commenced his work.

It was his settled determination, and he did not hesitate to make it fully known, to have a model school, on his own favorite plan; although the pecuniary means were wanting. He had not ten dollars in the world. All his resources, after paying for his medical education and a few books, and after remunerating his father, as he was proud to believe he did, for the expense of bringing him up, were soon exhausted in fitting up his school room,—in the purchase of maps, designs, vessels for flowers and plants, and such fixtures, as, in his judgment, would conduce to the proper cultivation of the mind and heart and taste of his pupils. He rightly judged that a plain and simple people, who knew him well, would not seriously object to innovations which cost them nothing in dollars and cents. He was, indeed, regarded as a little visionary, but was permitted to go on. And in his missionary life—going from house to house for his board—he had opportunity for making, from time to time, such explanations as were quite satisfactory.

Besides carrying out and perfecting the approved method of teaching the elementary branches, which he had for several years been applying with so much success, he added to them several others, particularly in defining, grammar, and geography. He introduced also, what he called his silent, or Quaker exercise. This consisted in requiring his pupils, at a certain time every morning—usually immediately after the opening of the school and devotional exercises—to lay aside every thing else, and give themselves up to reflection on the events, duties &c., of the twenty-four hours next preceding. At the close of this unbroken silence, which usually lasted five minutes, any pupil was liable to be called upon to relate the recitations and events of the preceding day, in their proper order and sequence.

In commencing this school, in his native town, Dr. Alcott had other, and very exalted ulterior aims. His warm heart embraced no less

than the whole of his townsmen. These he meant to enlighten, elevate, and change, until Wolcott should become, instead of a rude, unenlightened, obscure place, a miniature Switzerland.

But his pulmonary difficulties, which had been for ten years increasing upon him, aggravated, no doubt, by hard study, improper diet, and other irregularities of the preceding winter, now became threatening in the extreme. Besides a severe cough and great emaciation, he was followed by hectic fever and the most exhausting and discouraging perspirations. He fought bravely to the last moment; but was compelled to quit the field and relinquish for the present all hopes of accomplishing his mission.

For a short time he followed the soundest medical advice he could obtain. He kept quiet, took a little medicine, ate nutritious food, and when his strength would permit, breathed pure air. This course was at length changed for one of greater activity, and less stimulus. He abandoned medicine, adopted, for a time, the "starvation" system, or nearly that, and threw himself, by such aids as he could obtain, into the fields and woods, and wandered among the hills and mountains.

In the autumn he was evidently better. He was able to perform light horticultural labors a few hours of the day, and to ride on horseback. For six months he rode on horseback almost daily, as a sort of journeyman physician; at the end of which period he commenced the practice of medicine on his own responsibility, in the same place where he had last labored, and where he was born—still continuing to make his professional visits on horseback.

His hopes of reforming his native town now revived. He not only practiced medicine, but took a deep interest in the moral and intellectual condition of the people. He superintended a Sabbath School; aided in the examination of the public school teachers; held teachers' meetings, in "his own hired house," &c., &c. Not Oberlin himself in his beloved Ban de La Roche, had purer or more benevolent or more exalted purposes.

As a member of the prudential committee on common schools, he was active, efficient, and highly useful. He was, in fact, the soul of the board. If a teacher was to be examined, it was under his direction and eye; if the schools were to be visited officially, he was always on hand to fulfill the public expectation; if the teachers were to convene weekly, for mutual improvement, it was by his suggestion and at his house. If a new school book was needed, he was consulted. His counsels were often regarded as decisive. No time or means which did not interfere with his professional duties, was grudged, when he had the slightest hope of promoting the public good.

Occasionally however, as might have been expected, his zeal outran his knowledge, and his movements were regretted. Cardell's "Jack Halyard," for example, was adopted for a class-book in reading for *all the classes* in the schools; when it *should* have been used by those of a certain stage of progress only. But like Goldsmith's village schoolmaster, "e'en his failings leaned to virtue's side," and were soon forgotten.

We have seen something of his desire for public improvement in his attempt to form a youthful library. While teaching a public school, he was in the habit of collecting a small library of useful books for the young, which he used, during the term, as a school library—giving away the volumes at the close of the term, to his pupils. It does not appear that, at this early period, the subject of school libraries had ever been agitated; but here was at least the idea in embryo.

As soon as he was fairly established as a physician, he began to collect a library for the town. Its volumes were loaned, from time to time, to such persons as had already imbibed a taste for reading; and doubtless had a good influence. But the plan was so troublesome that he soon abandoned it; and in his stead prevailed with his friends and townsmen to establish a public town library on the ruins of the old one already mentioned.

He had already begun to write for the newspapers, on various subjects, particularly on common school education. A long and stormy series had been published—though in an uncouth and somewhat bombastic style—in the *Columbian Register* of New Haven, as early as 1823. Several shorter series on the same subject appeared in this and other papers during the years 1826 and 1827. The habit was not wholly discontinued while he was pursuing the practice of medicine and surgery. Among his contributions of this sort, between the years 1826 and 1829, were a number of articles in the *Boston Journal of Education*, then under the care of Mr. William Russell.

A correspondence was also opened about this time, with Mr. Russell, as well as with Rev. Samuel J. May, of Brooklyn, in Connecticut, and several other warm friends of educational improvement, in different parts of the last mentioned state, particularly in Hartford. This correspondence was valuable as an aid in maturing his own views, and those of others.

On entering the fourth year of his medical practice, he found his health so much improved that he volunteered to return to teaching. This was in the autumn of 1829. In less than two weeks he was teaching a district school in the adjoining town of Southington.

His school, though in a somewhat remote corner of the town, was large, and made up of rather heterogeneous materials. Here he pursued his improved methods of teaching without molestation. There were a few complaints about too rigid discipline; but in general, his course met with approbation. In the method of teaching English grammar, especially Etymology, he even made large advances. This method was published both in the *Journal of Education* and the *Confessions of a Schoolmaster*; but they were so novel, and yet so important, that teachers and friends of education who have not seen either of these works, will doubtless be glad to read a brief description of them. The following, for example, was his method of teaching the definition of the verb.

Without any preliminary information with regard to what he was about to do, he would ask his pupils to take their slates and pencils,—or pen and paper, if more convenient—and be ready to attend to his direction. Then, stamping on the floor with his foot, or clapping his hands, he would require them to write down what they saw him do. When this was done, he would perform some other common action, such as whistling, hopping, jumping, coughing, laughing, or singing, and tell them to write again. When he had proceeded far enough for a single lesson, he would tell them, one by one, to read aloud what they had written. Some would be found to have expressed the action, as *stamping*, in different words, or in more than one word; but in general they were found to have seized the idea; and after a few attempts they would succeed in writing the proper words very readily. “Now,” he would say, “what have you been doing?” The reply would be various, according to the genius of the pupil; but, by cross questions, he would usually soon find they had taken hold of the main idea, viz., that the words they had written described actions. When the point was fairly secured, he would add: “These words, which you have written, are *verbs*.” “Now,” he would ask, “what is a verb?” Nor would he be satisfied till he found they perfectly understood the matter. Such a definition is never forgotten.

He did not always commence with the names of *actions* or verbs, but oftener with *nouns* or the names of *things*. In that case he would set them first to writing down the names of all the things in the room, or in their father's garden, or in the road between that and the school-house. The names of actions came next; then substitutes for names, or pronouns. For this last, and indeed, for all the parts of speech, and for most of their divisions and subdivisions, he had his peculiar methods.

His first etymological course of teaching on this plan was made as an experiment. It was in the depth of a very cold winter, and some

of the pupils, among whom was one female, had to walk a mile or more, in deep snow. The proposal made by the teacher was, that they should come to the school room at sunrise, and remain an hour. The course was to consist of ten lessons. The class consisted of ten individuals, and not one of them failed of attending punctually from the beginning to the end of the course. Their progress was respectable. They acquired as much solid knowledge on this subject, during the ten lessons of an hour each, as is usually acquired in a whole term on the ordinary plan.

In the progress of the winter he made a successful attempt to convene teachers, one or two evenings in a week, for mutual improvement. They were some eight or ten in number. One was a female. They read such works as Hall's "Lectures on School-Keeping," and the "District School as it was," and made their comments. They also gave an account, mutually, of their experience and progress as instructors.

The impression made by these labors was deep and abiding, but it slowly impaired his health and depressed his spirits; and, being fearful of a relapse of his pulmonary tendencies he abandoned, for a time, all hope of teaching permanently.

His plan now was to find, if possible, a manual labor school, where he might study a little more thoroughly his profession, at little, if any expense. But, as it appeared, on inquiry, that nothing had yet been done, he gave up the pursuit, and concluded to labor on the farm for the summer, near New Haven.

But just as he was settling down on the farm, he had occasion to be in Hartford, where, to his surprise, he met Rev. Wm. C. Woodbridge, who had returned from Europe; and though in feeble health, was endeavoring to rouse the attention of a few friends of education to the necessity of forming a school for teachers, on the plan of Mr. Fellenberg's school, in Hofwyl, which he had been for some time studying. Mr. Woodbridge inquired of Dr. Alcott what he considered the capital error of modern education. "The custom of pushing the cultivation of the intellect at the expense of health and morals," was the reply. This question and reply laid the foundation of an acquaintance and friendship that was as lasting as the life of the parties.

It was not difficult for Dr. Alcott to yield so much of his own individuality of opinion and purpose as to become an assistant to Mr. Woodbridge in his endeavors to effect his purpose of establishing, somewhere in the vicinity of Hartford, a miniature Fellenberg school. He had unbounded confidence in the integrity and plans of Mr. Woodbridge, and high hopes of his success; and of becoming himself a

Vehrli in the new institution. So great was this confidence that though encumbered with a debt of some twelve or fifteen hundred dollars, which he had contracted in order to establish himself in the practice of medicine, and which he had not yet been able, in any part, to cancel, he consented, with the permission of his creditors, to labor for a year or two with Mr. Woodbridge, at the very moderate compensation of twelve dollars a month; which would just clothe him, and pay the annual interest of his debt. And even when, sometime afterward, he had the offer of a school in an adjacent town at \$300 a year—an offer which two years before he would have accepted with all his heart—he only required that Mr. Woodbridge should raise his wages from twelve to fifteen dollars. This is mentioned to shew his devotion, at this time, to the cause of common school improvement.

His employments with Mr. Woodbridge were at first various; for such was his hope of the future, that he was content for the present with "small things,"—the preparation of a map, the correction of a portion of geography, or the preparation of an essay or a review. Mr. Woodbridge not only sanctioned but encouraged the continuance of his appeals to the friends of common schools through the periodicals. He also made frequent and persevering excursions into the surrounding country towns to examine their schools, and report concerning them in the papers and journals. The press teemed with his articles; especially the Connecticut Observer and Hartford Courant. One very substantial and elaborate review of a report on the Manual Labor School of Pennsylvania—the product of his pen—appeared about this time, which met with much favor, and was quoted by foreign writers.

While associated with Mr. Woodbridge he not only made the means of elevating the common schools his constant study, but in concert with him, laid many plans for the advancement of the cause. He conceived the idea of establishing a journal of education, but his own and Mr. Woodbridge's indigence, and his own great inexperience and general diffidence, prevented. He was more successful, however, than formerly, in his attempts to rouse public inquiry on the subject, by his contributions to the periodical press, and by his pedestrian excursions, and occasional conversations and lectures.

It was during this period, that is, the years 1830 and 1831, that he prepared, and on sundry occasions delivered his Essay on the Construction of School Houses, to which the American Institute of Instruction, in the autumn of 1831, awarded a premium, and which led the way to that large and thorough improvement in this department, which is now going on in this country and elsewhere. He also wrote

and presented to the same body an essay on penmanship; which, though it did not obtain the premium, was deemed second in point of excellence, was recommended to be published, and was widely circulated.

One field of labor, in which he was wont to engage, has been thus far unintentionally omitted. The public common school fund in Connecticut had at this time become so large that its increase, as apportioned and applied to common schools, was beginning to be felt to be an evil rather than a blessing. It was sufficient to pay the teachers for a few months of the year, and the parents had almost ceased to take a personal interest in their management and general conduct. The late Mr. Gallaudet, Hon. Roger M. Sherman, Hon. Hawley Olmsted, Mr. Woodbridge, &c., saw the necessity of forming a state society for the improvement of common schools, in which this subject and other topics should be freely discussed. Such a society had been actually formed, when Dr. Alcott and Mr. Woodbridge became associated; and had held several meetings. Into this movement Dr. Alcott entered with all his heart, and he did much to sustain it.

A history of the first public school in Hartford, in which some recent advances had been made, a volume of a hundred pages or so, was written by him about this time, and also a volume of nearly the same size, entitled a Word to Teachers. They were crude productions, but not devoid of a certain kind of merit, in that they were highly practical. But his chief forte, in writing, was the newspaper; for if its style was not more elegant,—it was more racy and spirited. It is believed that his essays in conjunction with the labors of others, had much influence not only in New England but throughout the United States.

But the most important of all his numerous avocations, at this period, was his travels for the purpose of collecting facts concerning schools. When Mr. Woodbridge could spare him, and when, too, his health became somewhat impaired by too much confinement to the desk, he would sally forth on one of these expeditions, on which he was at times absent several weeks.

In 1831, Mr. Woodbridge, having removed to Boston, to superintend and edit the Journal of Education, which he had purchased of its first proprietor, urgently solicited Dr. Alcott to follow him. At first he hesitated, as it was feared, both by him and his friends, that a residence in the eastern part of Massachusetts would hasten apace his consumption. But having in 1830, abandoned all exciting food and drink, and adopted such other improved physical habits, as seemed to be imparting new energies to his frame, he at length

concluded to accept the proposals; and very early in the year 1832, he removed to Boston.

The journey was made during a great snow storm in January, which before he reached Boston, turned into a severe drenching rain, in which by an accident to the stage coach he became so much exposed, that immediately after his arrival at Boston, he was taken ill with hemorrhage from the lungs, and other threatening symptoms. But under the care of Dr. J. C. Warren and good nursing, he recovered slowly, and was able to proceed to the duties which by his engagement with Mr. Woodbridge, were assigned him. From that day to this, a quarter of a century, he has, with the exception of one or two less formidable attacks, enjoyed a most surprising immunity from pulmonary disease; nor has he often had so much as a common cold.

Dr. Alcott had formed many valuable acquaintances in Connecticut; among them, Dr. John L. Comstock, Rev. Horace Hooker, Rev. C. A. Goodrich, Noah Webster, A. F. Wilcox, and Josiah Holbrook. He left the state with regret; but with the expectation of returning to it in at most a few months. He did not however, return until after nearly twelve years.

Besides assisting Mr. Woodbridge in conducting the Journal (now Annals) of Education, by writing a large proportion of the articles on physical education, methods of instruction, &c., and a considerable number of book notices and reviews, he was for two years, 1832 and 1833, the practical editor of a Children's Weekly paper, started by Mr. Woodbridge and his aged father; one of the objects of which was to serve as a reading book in common schools. The paper was called the Juvenile Rambler. It was perhaps, the first paper of the kind ever issued in this country; and it so far succeeded as to be taken by several schools in very large numbers, and to be used with great satisfaction and profit. But it was troublesome to its editors, and at the end of two years was discontinued.

Dr. Alcott's labors in the cause of education, now became much more varied and extended. Besides assisting Mr. W., he wrote many fugitive pieces on various subjects connected with physical education and morals, and the advancement of common education—for amid all his miscellaneous labors he never lost sight for one moment, of the public school. He even lectured on this subject, not only before the American Institute of Instruction, the American Lyceum, and associations for educational improvement, but to teachers and parents, in various towns and cities of the commonwealth of Massachusetts, as well as of Rhode Island and Connecticut, and when he could

not in person attend public meetings of the friends of education, he often sent an essay to be read before them.

Among the latter was a tract entitled, "Missionaries of Education," which was subsequently published, and had a tolerably wide circulation. But his theory on this point, was evidently half a century in advance of the age, though it could not fail to recommend itself to all thinking men who took the trouble to peruse it, as replete with good sense, and dictated by a heart expanding with benevolence toward the rising generation.

In the years 1832 and 1833, he wrote a small volume for young men, entitled, "The Young Man's Guide," which besides being the first popular book of this class, that was perfectly reliable, and which expressed in a lucid manner, and in such a style as not to offend, some of the physiological dangers of young men, was written throughout in such a spirit of fatherly kindness, and such a simple style, as to win attention and secure an extensive sale. From the avails of this work, chiefly at four cents a copy, the author in the thirty-sixth year of his age, paid his debts, now of very long standing, and once more felt himself a free man. At the end of the year 1833, he was solicited by S. G. Goodrich to become the acting editor of a little monthly journal, which he had now been conducting one year, entitled Parley's Magazine. He had the editorial charge of this work four successive years; with how much of wisdom he conducted it, the public have long ago decided. He also edited "The People's Magazine," a semi-monthly work, for one year.

In 1834 came out the "House I Live in." Many of the ideas had indeed already appeared either in the Juvenile Rambler or elsewhere, but here they were incorporated into a volume. This was one of the most truly original works of the age. It is still popular with a certain class of people, and deservedly so; though it never had a rapid sale. It was re-published in England, and has been used in some places as a class-book in the schools.

"The Moral Reformer and Teacher in the Human Constitution," a monthly periodical devoted to the discussion of various topics in the department of physical education, was begun in 1835, without pecuniary means, and with only a single subscriber. It was indorsed however, by such men as the late talented Dr. John C. Warren; and had for nine years, under the various names of Moral Reformer, Library of Health, and Teacher of Health, a very considerable influence; though it was directly and indirectly a source of much pecuniary loss to the editor.

In 1836, the "Young Mother" appeared. This was a work on

physical education, for the female heads of families; and though not very original, was a work of much value. The "Young Wife," "Young Husband," "Young Woman's Guide," and "Young House-keeper," all of them possessing various degrees of merit, and written for the family, followed in the course of two or three years. So did the "Mother in Her Family," "Living on Small Means," "The Sabbath School as it should be," "Confessions of a Schoolmaster," &c., &c. "The Mother in Her Family" had a more limited circulation than most of Dr. Alcott's other family books, and perhaps deserved it. The author's attempt at imagination was an effort for which his peculiar education had not prepared him. It had merit, but it had many faults.

It is also worthy of remark that one or two of the forty or fifty volumes of various sizes which Dr. Alcott has written for the Sabbath School Libraries of various Christian denominations, though works of general worth and merit, are slightly open to the same criticism; while the greater part of this class of his works are, in every respect, as juvenile works, of a high order.

His contributions to the periodical press, some of which have been alluded to, many of them to the Recorder, Watchman, and Traveler of Boston, and to the Boston Medical and Surgical Journal, have been almost innumerable. He has preserved copies of more than a thousand.

Dr. Alcott continued to labor on the Annals of Education, to the end of its career. After having long aided Mr. Woodbridge, sometimes for pay and sometimes without, and the failure of the latter's health in 1836, Dr. Alcott became his coadjutor, and then for several years his successor.

Probably no living individual has devoted more hours, during the last forty years, to education, especially that of the common school and the family, than Dr. Alcott. Not many days have passed during that time, in which he has not performed some labor in that field. Besides his writings, he has also spoken much and often; giving, usually, lectures either on hygiene to the scholars,* or on instruction and discipline, mainly for the benefit of teachers.

* He has related to us the following anecdotes, which may serve for illustrations. Not long since a little boy came running up to him, saying: "How do you do, Dr. A? When are you coming to see our school again?" "Have I ever visited your school?" was the reply. "Oh, yes sir, more than a year ago; and you said you would try to come again." "Where is your school?" Here in West Newton; don't you remember it? You told us about the *houses we lived in*; and about eating green apples; and I have not eaten a green apple since."