

THE ART OF STORY-TELLING,<sup>1</sup> *with Illustrations.*

By A. BURRELL, ESQ. (Principal of Borough Road Training College).

Mrs. Devonshire, in introducing the speaker, apologised for the absence of Lord Lytton, Chairman of the Executive, who had been unable to get away from Birmingham. They might look forward, however, to hear his lordship on Monday morning, when he would speak on "Some Duties and Responsibilities of Early Manhood," and again on Tuesday afternoon, when he would occupy the chair.

Mr. Burrell began by accusing all parents of being story-tellers. But as they had in their time told so many stories, they would doubtless like to hear one or two. His stories were not all stories for children; they were for grown-up people, and therefore belonged to that rarer order which were not so often heard. His views on story-telling were entirely at variance with those held by the Education authorities in England. He believed in reading aloud as the best and quickest means of studying, appreciating, realising, and interpreting the message of literature; and story-telling

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formed an admirable forerunner to reading aloud. But by story-telling he did not necessarily mean recitation; for story-telling was only a branch of recitation of which he thought a good deal. In every town and every village to-day this art of story-telling was practised, but nobody noticed it; no painter ever drew inspiration from it, no sculptor had ever taken its evanescence and fixed it in immortal stone. It was too ordinary for the student to have anything to do with, and he had been searching for years in the British Museum to find a single book on an art which was of such great importance and which was so widely dispersed as story-telling was to-day. Nowadays people looked askance if asked to learn stories of a thousand lines. They were forgetting how to use their memories.

The antiquity of the short story was interestingly traced, and the lecturer pointed out that Jesus employed the short story, represented by the parables. These stories had been annotated, edited, and preached to death, yet their beauty remained. What must they have been to the crowds who heard them for the first time? He narrated many stories with striking effectiveness. Children he urged were born story-tellers, and before people taught them to recite, they should encourage them to retail [sic] the stories they knew themselves. He drew an amusing contrast between the child, unobserved and untrained, telling a tale to his fellows, and the same child a few years later reciting before a crowd—supremely unhappy—a piece that everybody knew, and to which they listened only to see if he performed the gestures as he had been taught. Possibly the boy would hear some of the comments, "Quite a man," "Just like an actor"; nobody said "Poor child," or asked was it good for him to be there repeating a teacher's version of a piece?

The lecturer was still more amusing in his criticism of a class of twenty girls reciting, putting out the right arm together, and the left arm together, pointing as one person to the "long fields of barley and rye," and sitting down together with a "plump." Instead of those girls repeating the poem together, their individuality should have been encouraged.

Resuming his argument, Mr. Burrell said he claimed for story-telling that it was one of the best ways known of teaching

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and training the young. He claimed for it that it discouraged all sham passion and exaggeration and taut expression, and encouraged simplicity, and the cultivation of the voice. He claimed for it that it was the best preparation for the teaching of ordinary subjects he could possibly imagine. It fostered a real interest and enthusiasm, and interpreted literature; therefore it led to a real love of it. It developed the beautiful and artistic side of a child's life, and was in deadly opposition to all that was blatant, coarse, and vulgar. The art of story-telling involved a great deal of memorising, which could not but be a perpetual pressure, and could not but have a good effect. As to how the teacher who wished to study the art might proceed, he would suggest the keeping of a common-place book. It was a perpetual cheap library. The time spent on filling it was time excellently spent. His own book was always out on loan, which he thought more than justified its existence.

In acknowledging an enthusiastic vote of thanks, Mr. Burrell, replying to a question, said he did not think the imagination of children was apt to "run riot" owing to fairy tales in the nursery. Children were not encouraged as they should be to tell stories and to revel in the imagination which he believed all or nearly all of them possessed. He pleaded not so much for the telling of stories for children, but for the encouragement of children to tell stories. Children should be encouraged to use this art which they nearly all possessed, and to continue the practice of it. Was it necessary that children should cease to practise the art at a certain age? Why should they not become story-tellers when they grew up? He would say quite seriously that it was not a hard thing to tell a story. There were more really good story-tellers in every town than they had any inkling of. He would urge them to form story-telling clubs. Two or three were quite enough to form the nucleus of a club. He had known such clubs having been formed in answer to his request, and they were nearly always successful.

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<sup>1</sup> Report from the *Sussex Daily News*.