

What Shall Children Read?

The agitation of the question of putting American literature into American school readers has begun to stir up the newspapers of Missouri. The St. Louis *Republic* has taken a somewhat skeptical view of the proposition to advance home grown literature; and says with an ill concealed sneer that "if the choice is between Missouri literature and SHAKESPEARE we propose to stand by SHAKESPEARE until Missouri has produced something almost if not entirely as good." And this, despite the fact that a Missourian has won golden opinions as a playwright in the East and has delighted thousands of hearers with "Alabama" and "In Mizzoura," and in defiance of the further fact that the lamented L. U. REAVIS has contributed to posterity that startling romance worthy of an Arabian night, "St. Louis, the Future Great City."

It is an unpardonable assumption, however, that, because the *Republic* uses apparently an airy and flippant tone in its estimate of WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S writings as contrasted with the literary efforts of the Missourian of to-day, the Missourian must shrink from a proper assertion of his status in the field of letters. It is a well established fact that for purposes of fundamental training, as a means of getting the mind in a healthy, receptive condition, the English classics are invaluable. It is true that the juvenile intelligence does not always grasp the full purport of Hamlet's soliloquy or Othello's defense, but that is not the fault of Hamlet or Othello or of Mr. SHAKESPEARE, who was not thinking of EPES SARGENT or MCGUFFEY. The desirable fact remains that admirable selections stimulate in youth a taste for the pure and good in literature, with the result that as the adolescent mind develops and expands it feasts on contemporaneous Missouri writers with a keener appreciation and a quickened enjoyment.

With propriety it may be claimed that it is not necessary in this discussion to make invidious distinctions, to speak slurringly either of SHAKESPEARE or of AUGUSTUS THOMAS, Esq., of MACAULAY or of REAVIS, of GOLDSMITH or of any of the score of poets who have immortalized the creeks which percolate through this great commonwealth. Each has a mission and each has filled or is filling it in a manner acceptable to his time and generation. At the same time it is perhaps better, for the reasons advanced, that the English classics should have a slight call in elementary school instruction. It is possible for the mind inured to the leading English authors to turn with pleasurable emotions and full appreciation to Missouri literature, yet it is not altogether certain that a course of cis-Mississippi lore will lead to a hungering after or perfect understanding of the writers of a more general reputation. This matter should be looked at calmly and good-naturedly, without personal prejudice or local bias, and settled for the best interest of the children. Wouldn't the works of SHAKESPEARE pall on a taste accustomed to Missouri authorship?