

**READING AS A FINE ART.
TRANSLATED FROM
THE NINTH EDITION**

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Reading as a Fine Art. Translated from the Ninth Edition by Ernest Legouvé & Abby Langdon
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ERNEST LEGOUVÉ & ABBY LANGDON ALGER

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Reading as a Fine Art

BY

ERNEST LEGOUVE

OF THE ACADEMIE FRANÇAISE

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BY

ABBY LANGDON ALGER

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TO THE SCHOLARS
OF
THE HIGH AND NORMAL SCHOOL.

For you this sketch was written : permit me to dedicate it to you ; in fact, to intrust it to your care. Pupils to-day, to-morrow you will be teachers ; to-morrow, generation after generation of youth will pass through your guardian hands. An idea received by you, must of necessity reach thousands of minds. Help me, then, to spread abroad the work in which you have some share, and allow me to add to the great pleasure of having numbered you among my hearers the still greater happiness of calling you my assistants.

E. LEGOUVÉ.

Paris, April, 1877.

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READING AS A FINE ART.



PART FIRST.



CHAPTER I.

FIRST STEPS. — HOW I LEARNED TO READ.

NOTHING is small in the great matter of education ; and secondary as the question we are to treat may be, it is important, from the simple fact that it points to progress to be made in the art of instruction. In America, reading aloud is considered one of the chief studies in public schools, — one of the bases of primary education. In France, it is not even reckoned an accomplishment ; it is regarded as something strange and unnecessary, almost as an affectation. I desire to contest this prejudice, and to contribute my mite towards introducing the art of reading into our customs and the list of school duties.

In the first place, is reading an art ? Many doubt

it; some deny it. For myself, thirty years of study and experience have convinced me that it is an art as difficult as it is substantial, as useful as it is difficult of attainment; and this I hope to prove logically, but without becoming wearisome. Let me choose my own way to reach this end, and tell you the story of my own progress.

I was always extremely fond of reading aloud, this being an inherited taste; for my father was esteemed one of the most famous readers, I may say, one of the best teachers of his day. When Mlle. Duchesnois made her *début*, the programme read: "Mlle. Duchesnois, pupil of M. Legouvé." Does not this prove that elocution and the theatre were more highly valued, if not more honored, then than now? What member of the Academy would venture now to join his name on a play-bill with that of an actress? I, of course, am out of the question; for the love of elocution was born and bred in me, with a fellow-feeling for the actor, for which I have often been blamed, but which I hope I shall never outlive. As a boy at school, I organized a little troop of actors of my own age, who spent their vacation-hours in reciting whole acts of Racine, Corneille, and Molière to family and friends. All parts seemed good to me, — kings, lovers, servants,

and noble fathers ; nothing staggered my youthful ardor. I even played the tragedy queen, on occasion, in imitation of antiquity. Of course, it was rough, unequal, stagey, and bombastic ; my voice was often hoarse : but beneath all the froth and fustian lurked some grains of truth and feeling, which kept my heart warm with the wholesome fever of admiration.

On leaving school, a happy accident introduced me to a fine teacher of elocution.

I was to read one of my first poetical efforts, "The Two Mothers," at the Conservatory, before the Philotechnic Society. On reciting it to my master, M. Bouilly, he exclaimed : "My boy, you don't set off your wares for what they're worth ! Go ask my friend, M. Febvé, to give you a few lessons." These lessons opened my eyes : they taught what I never dreamed, that elocution has its grammar ; and M. Febvé also gave me a most useful bit of advice. "The Conservatory Hall," said he, "is like a good Stradivarius : no violin is more sweetly resonant ; the sounds that you confide to those melodious walls will return to you fuller and more mellow than ever ; the voice plays upon them as the fingers on an instrument. Be careful not to raise your voice too much ; and remember one im-