

# The Educational Weekly.

TORONTO, DECEMBER 10, 1885.

We are glad that the Minister of Education is using the influence of his name and position to promote self-culture among the members of our profession. In the circular which has just been issued, he recommends courses of reading for third, second, and first-class teachers. To those who are desirous of self-improvement, there is very much gained when they have continually in mind, as a set purpose to be accomplished, a well-planned course of reading; and there is stimulus in the thought that many are contemporaneously pursuing the same course with the same end in view, and amid very much the same conditions, and hence amid the same distractions. Should the teachers' associations throughout the Province decide to adopt the suggestions of the Minister, there will soon be an army of several thousand men and women devoting their spare hours to culture, instead—as would most likely be the case if there were not some such general co-operation as this—of allowing them to be dissipated in purposeless action, and perhaps in idle frivolity.

In the courses marked out pedagogy occupies a prominent place. This is a wise provision. What our Province now needs, in every rank of the profession, is intellectual work; work with thought and method, and purpose in it; not mere imitation of others' handicraft, but informed with living principles, self-sought and self-obtained, though based on the experience and reasoning of others. Nothing leads to thinking and observation more than the study of the thoughts and observations of those who have pursued their investigations in a scientific spirit, and have embodied them in a scientific form. Let no one suppose, however, that because he reads scientific works on education he thereby becomes an educator. The reading will help him much, but he must think and observe for himself. Too many teachers, however, rely altogether on what they are pleased to call their own thinking, and their own observation, and disdain to learn the science of their profession, disdain to be informed by the great masters of pedagogy. This is the curse of the profession; this, the disease, this, the pestiferous conceit, as common in high places as in the humblest, and destructive of progress and earnest labor wherever it exists.

Of the books prescribed we have only to say that, with one or two exceptions, they are all excellent. No two committees would make the same selection, and, where the choice is so great, the difficulty of fixing upon the absolutely best is infinite. But we think the

Minister has made a mistake in prescribing so much to be taken in each year. There are two books in pedagogy, six in science and eight in literature and history—sixteen in all. In our opinion eight or ten would be a large list. The weak point in the scheme is that many will commence with good hopes, but finding their time and strength unequal to the task, will become weary and dispirited, and will give up, and in the end will be more apathetic in regard to self-improvement than ever. Of course we can judge only from our own experience, but that leads us to say that the course prescribed is in quantity about twice as great as it should be.

We have one other remark to offer. We trust that those pursuing the course will own and keep the books they read and master. We have great faith in the abiding value of a library, *i.e.*, of a collection of books whose thoughts one has made one's own. The purchasing of books for mere ornament, or with an indefinite thought that sometime they may be of use, is a harmless luxury to those who can afford it, though inexcusable in others. It brings, however, no intellectual benefit. It adds nothing to one's intellectual capital. But the possession of books which have become dear friends through hours of close and pleasant companionship, is a luxury which the poorest should hardly deny himself; and these are the only books, except works of reference, whose merits are of a different order, that are afterwards of any real value to their possessor.

By article 24 of the late Regulations, teachers are empowered and directed to devote the Friday afternoon of each week to exercises departing from the ordinary routine of the school. This has been the practice of many good teachers for years; the embodiment of the provision in the Regulations simply gives a legal sanction to the custom, and will defend the teacher from the adverse criticism of the illiberal, whenever it may be directed against this sort of work. We wish to suggest some ways by which these afternoons can be made interesting and useful. Music, which we hope will soon be a characteristic feature of school work in every grade, should, in these exercises, be largely employed, and, as far as possible, it should be participated in by the school as a whole. Readings and recitations by the pupils, of pieces which they themselves have selected, will, of course, be frequently given. The most meritorious compositions that have been written during the previous week or month, and heard only in class before, might properly, on these semi-public occasions, be honored with a rendering before the

assembled school. The work of the youngest pupils should be accorded as much distinction in this way as that of the elder ones, and it will prove to be equally interesting. If teachers have a taste for science, they can encourage their pupils to make correctly named collections of woods, barks, grains, leaves, grasses, ferns, wild-flowers, butterflies, beetles, etc. Having been previously inspected by the teacher, and passed by him, they might be publicly received and placed in the school museum on these afternoons. We know of nothing outside of systematic science study which will so stimulate and develop the powers of observation in young children as the preparation of such collections as are here suggested. Then, these afternoons can be used by the teacher in giving informal lessons, by means of pleasant talks and conversation, on conduct and deportment. Nothing needs more attention than these matters. Another profitable exercise will be the correction of grammatical inaccuracies which may have been heard and noted in the playground during the previous week. But the excellent ways of spending these afternoons are so many, that there are few teachers who will not be more at loss to know which to omit, than which to make use of.

THE Waterloo resolutions, asking that a fee of \$25 be imposed upon all candidates presenting themselves for the third-class professional examinations, are exceeded in protective zeal by those proposed in another association, by which \$150 is to be the fee. Our correspondent of November 12th defends the imposition of a fee, inasmuch as it is already recognized in principle,—boards of trustees being empowered to impose a fee of \$5, and county boards of examiners an additional fee of \$2,—and says, furthermore, that the question is one simply of degree. To this we at once assent. But the fee proposed is excessive, and we are quite sure will not be agreed to by public opinion. A fair share of the cost of their professional preparation the public will rightly demand of teachers; but if model schools can be maintained at no more expense to the candidate than a \$5 fee, the public will not ask that the fee be enlarged. The public are naturally interested in obtaining cheap teachers, or rather in obtaining teachers as cheaply as possible, and have no desire to help the teachers of the Province to become a close corporation. The remedy for too easy entrance to the profession, it seems to us, is, that the standard of qualification be gradually raised; of this we shall speak next week.