

TEACHERS AS WRITERS.

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A PARAGRAPH from an Ontario paper, asserting the incapacity of teachers to make editors, lately went the rounds of the Canadian press. According to its writer, the instructor, heavily handicapped by grammar and the proprieties, cannot possess the gift of ready writing essential to the newspaper man. This sling at the teaching profession was not wholly uncalled for. No one who has been severely drilled in the classics, who has been taught to regard a false quantity as about equal to a felony, can turn to writing without at first feeling hampered by the strict standard he has been forced to attempt in his student days. The imagination of the scholar is curbed by his over-developed critical powers. He thinks too much of avoiding flaws, repetitions, sameness of construction, and too little of compelling attention and producing conviction. He works more to disarm the censure of the few than to attract the interest of the many. These tendencies, which are heavy weights to carry in any kind of writing, are millstones in journalism.

But they do not of necessity last forever. And, besides, only a minority of teachers have had the advantages and disadvantages of a severe training in languages and rhetoric. The bulk of the schoolmasters and school-mistresses who flood waste-paper baskets with their offerings have never been in any danger of becoming slaves to their high standard of criticism.

It is this profusion of uninteresting contributions offered by the profession, more than anything else, that periodically rouses the ire of some busy editor. It is the vanity and pedantry of too little learning, more than the over-polish or guarded accuracy of too much learning. Intellectual conceit is fed by

habitual contact with undeveloped minds, and this conceit is not lessened in teachers by the fact that the *interest* of their pupils prompts them to affect admiration or mirth at their fancies or anecdotes in the classroom. Certain it is that many editors suffer from the number of unacceptable MSS. received from the scholastic profession. The editor of a quarterly review, once a teacher himself, told me that he was fairly deluged with them.

But, if the teaching fraternity produces a great many bad things, it has produced many good things too. It has probably gathered more laurels than any other profession in the field, if not of journalism, at least of general literature. Plato and Aristotle, the greatest teachers, were also the greatest philosophical writers of Hellas. Tyræus, whose strains revived the martial ardour of the Spartans, was an Athenian schoolmaster; and the fervid Sappho herself was a Lesbian schoolma'am.

In our own literature, however, we have more decisive proof that the atmosphere of a school-room is not fatal to literary inspiration. Among the poets, Milton and Goldsmith taught in academies; so did Samuel Johnson, if he is to be called a poet; so did James Macpherson, the daring fabricator of "Ossian's Poems;" so did Beattie before he became a professor; so did Shakspeare himself, according to a tradition. In his "Hudibras" Butler satirizes the father of his pupil. Campbell was a tutor in a private family. Skelton, the father of English satire, acted in the same capacity to King Henry the Eighth. Thomas Warton, the Laureate, succeeded his father—a poet himself—as Professor of Poetry at Oxford. His brother, Joseph, the third bard of the family, was