

The True Teacher, forever a Student.

No reform is more needed in our schools than the introduction of the custom generally among teachers, of studying the lessons they are to teach. Were we called upon to indicate the causes which most generally lead to the failures either in the instruction or government of the common schools, we would point to the neglect of teachers to learn their lessons as the most prominent and pernicious of them all.

It is but a small part of the teacher's business to look upon the text book and note whether a pupil has recited the lesson as it is printed there. If this is all then any one may teach who can read. And yet we may well fear whether there are not multitudes of professed teachers who do no more than this. We have ourselves heard men of competent learning, even college bred, go through recitation after recitation, reading the questions placed at the bottom of the page and then following with the eye the words in the book while the pupils repeated the answer, merely correcting them when a word was missed. Whatever this process may be called, it certainly is not teaching.

The teacher should know his lesson before hand. No previously acquired knowledge of the subject is sufficient; he should know the very lesson in the text book used by the pupils. There they have gained their ideas of the subject, and all teaching to be profitable to them must be based upon the very lesson they have learned; all explanations and illustrations must in some way spring from that and cluster around it. Associated thus with that, the teacher's explanations will be remembered, or easily recalled; but otherwise they will be often misunderstood and quickly forgotten.

Nor will a previous familiarity with the text book be sufficient. Nothing short of such present knowledge of the lesson as will permit the teacher to go through the recitation with his text book closed, can enable him to teach with the highest success. Memory is treacherous and knowledge

fades away. The lesson learned a year ago cannot be fresh in mind to-day. No mechanic would be employed to do a delicate piece of work if it were known that he had not sharpened his tools since last year, especially if they had lain for months, exposed to rust. Lessons are the teacher's tools and used to be sharpened by daily study.

The teacher who does not learn his lesson before hand must study it during the recitation. Having asked the question which he finds at the bottom of the page he must look through the wilderness of course and fine print to find the answer; he must dwell upon that answer till he understands it. This may require him to read half a page of context and notes in fine print, or if it be a lesson in geography he must often search the map till he finds the place he has asked for. And while his time and energies are thus occupied how much of teaching can he do?

The pupils become inattentive, and learn to despise a teacher who knows so little of his business.

Nor are the class before him the only ones injured by this loss of the teacher's ever present attention. The whole school speedily learns that the teacher's eyes and thoughts are engrossed with a lesson. The temptation is too strong to be resisted; the spirit of fun and mischief triumphs, and the teacher is recalled to consciousness by the suppressed titter or loud whisper, pervading the school. The difficulty of his herculean task becomes greatly increased.—There, on the one hand, is his lesson demanding for its completion the sharpest use of eyes and thoughts, and on the other, there is a school of noisy children needing to be watched every instant, as the only price of peace. Who wonders that, under such conditions so many teachers fail entirely, while others retire disgusted with the drudgery of school teaching, a drudgery caused largely by this neglect of all daily preparation for their duties?

Let the teacher study thoroughly the lessons he is to hear each day, and