The Educational Weekly.

TORONTO, MARCH 26, 1885.

We spoke lately of discouragement as being one of the strongest wasters of brain power: there is a method employed by some teachers to correct faults which is even worse in its injurious effects—ridicule. It does not perhaps so directly prevent the mind from concentrating its aculties, but indirectly we hold that its influence is in nine cases out of ten pernicious in the extreme.

Ridicule is a most powerful weapon—far more powerful than many of those who make use of it are apt to imagine. It is a question whether it should ever be made use of; certainly only in the most exceptional circumstances. There are few faults but can be corrected in other and preferable ways. For the correction of technical errors—errors of intellect, it need never be used. Moral faults only, and then only extremely rarely, should come under its influence. Boys are sensitive; and to ridicule more than anything else, especially where both sexes are taught in the same room. They are always apt, too, to attribute its exercise to wrong motives, to spite, littleness, even sometimes to cowardice or jealousy. The teacher, they think, takes advantage of his superiority and dignity. He is unassailable. And that dignity and superiority are sure in the end to suffer. It causes also a bad spirit to spring up between master and pupil. When ridicule is often resorted to reverence is sure sooner or later to be lost. Indeed a very few cases of correction by means of shaming the learner is enough to destroy all good feeling between him and his teacher. It stirs up strong emotions; gives rise to an angry spirit not easily afterwards quelled. Ridicule is not a matter between pupil and master only, it is a holding up of one member of a class for the laughter of his fellows. It amounts almost to a tacit confession of powerlessness on the part of the master to deal alone with a recalcitrant pupil. It brings in the aid of a boy's own companions to help in correcting him. These latter are his equals, many of them, perhaps, his inferiors, and to do this is to use very questionable means—however good the aim. Most boys rebel under such treatment. They may not seem to do so; they may apparently take it in very good part; but this is merely a concealing of the hurt they feel. And this hurt takes a long time to heal. Often, we may say, it festers and poisons the whole mind and moral nature.

We have spoken strongly, but it is on no insignificant subject. If the formation of character is one of the aims of the teacher—as we have so often insisted, let him be excessively cautious how he ridicules.

The best possible way to learn geography would probably be to travel through the country; perhaps the next best way is by studying the progress of a war in the newspapers with the aid of maps.

There are abundant opportunities of doing so at the present moment. Egypt, the Soudan, Abyssinia, with their relative positions; Russia, India, Persia, Afghanistan, and their relative positions, are now subjects of every-day conversation. Ignorance of these places not only argues want of conversance with the topics of the day, but also prevents any clear view being taken of such topics.

By means of a map, a newspaper, and the teacher's explanations, we think pupils might so interestingly be taught facts connected with the geography and history of the places mentioned that they would never afterwards fade from the memory. The war in the Soudan and the advance of Russia are probably discussed in their own homes; they hear about such things daily; some interest at all events is excited; and it would take little to make it fruitful.

In the two subjects we have mentioned there is a vast amount of facts which might be made use of. Thus, regarding Egypt: Why England is there; how Egypt affects the overland route to India; what connexion there is between Turkey and Egypt; what between the Soudan and Egypt; what differences we find in the character of the people as we travel from Lower Egypt towards the equatorial states; what is the chief trade in the latter; the character of the terrible deserts; the mode of travel across these; the usefulness of the camel; the peculiarities of the river Nile; the regions in which that stream rises; England's and America's achievements in exploring these; the Red Sea littoral and its principal ports; the towns in the interior interesting from strategic points of view—Korti, Dongola, Berber, Khartoum, Assouan, Wady Halfa; the routes to Khartoum—from Suakim to Berber, across the Nubian Desert, across the Bayuda desert, along the course of the Nile; how that stream is navigated; the dangers of the cataracts; the places of historic interest; the ruins; the battlefields; the names of the more famed Egyptologists; the various races inhabiting the country; how the fellaheen are treated; what is the form of government; what share England and France have taken in the government, etc. In regard to Russia in Asia also are numerous questions not beyond the comprehension of upper class pupils; such, for example, as: The relative positions of Russia, Persia, Afghanistan, Beloochistan, Turkestan, and India: Russia's gradual approach towards Herat; the importance of that town: the relations of Russia and England respectively to the Ameer; the character of the people and country of Afghanistan; the history of England's connexion with it; the reverses she has there suffered; etc.; etc. These are mere suggestions to which the teacher might add many more. The great advantage in using these countries at the present time for geography and history lessons is, that the facts connected with them can be made extremely interesting and so indelibly fixed in the mind.

Masters, we think, not seldom forget that between the most intelligent pupil in the class and the least so there is a very wide difference—also that intellectual capacities differ in the bent which heredity or education has given them.

In Canada this intellectual variety is very marked: the classes are large; the children are grouped together by a plan which seems to strive at striking an average of their knowledge of all the different subjects taught; and the pupils themselves come from various classes of society—not an unimportant factor in determining their mental calibre and predilections.

Is it possible in teaching such a class to keep in mind these differences? It is a hard matter certainly, yet one that cannot be altogether overlooked. In certain cases very wide degrees of knowledge or intelligence must necessarily be left out of consideration: we remember once making rather a failure in trying to teach a class in Algebra, when one pupil was perfectly *au fait* at quadratics while to another had to be explained the fact that if $a=2$, and $b=3$, $a+b=5$!

Could not now and then a bit of information for the precocious be thrown into the ordinary lesson? Some children drink in with avidity interesting explanations of difficulties which might at first sight be considered far beyond them. And such things—from their novelty or inherent interest, or curiousness, or some other reason—remain in the memory and bear fruit. We remember, before ever having heard that there was such a man as Dugald Stewart, being asked the difference between emulation and envy. The question was utterly beyond us; but when, some four or five years afterwards we came across the explanation, the question and the futile endeavors to answer it were vividly recalled.