

Special Papers.

THE "TEACHING LADDER" AND HOW TO CLIMB IT.*

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At the foot of the ladder stands the teacher. At the top is real and not mere apparent success. Intermediate between the two are the rungs or steps by means of which the ascent is to be made. These rungs may be multiplied exceedingly, according as the necessities of individual teachers may require.

We shall begin with the teacher and the outfit required for the efficient performance of his work. Among the absolute essentials in this outfit I place (1) maturity, (2) health, (3) knowledge, and (4) character, each of which requires a brief elaboration.

1. Maturity.—Notwithstanding the fact that sometimes we find good work done in the school-room by girls of seventeen and by lads of eighteen, I see no valid reason why these special ages should be fixed upon by our law makers as sufficiently mature for candidates to enter upon the arduous and important profession of teaching. One of the arguments in favor of the law as it now stands is "that the Province has not a sufficient supply of teachers." This may have been true ten or fifteen years ago, but it is certain that such is not the case now.

Another argument is "that such young persons are more sympathetic with children, and have greater enthusiasm for their work than older ones." My experience for the past ten years in large graded and model schools compels me to deny the assertion. Two of the greatest evils in both home and school training are misdirected sympathy and uncontrolled enthusiasm or fussiness in dealing with children. It has been said "that the teacher holds in his hands the key to the future well-being of the State." From the very nature of the case he lays the foundations which must mould the character of our future men and women. From the unfitness or the criminal neglect of parents it is he who really trains our children to habits of neatness, of order, of application, of obedience, of truthfulness, of honesty, in fact, of almost everything pertaining to manners and morals. Surely the wisest and the best should be selected to lay the foundations of these important elements of a high and noble character. The most able and skilful teacher should "bend the twig" in order that the tree may be rightly inclined. Is it not the rare exception, and not by any means the rule, to find girls and boys of seventeen and eighteen possessed of sufficient maturity of body and mind for the proper and efficient performance of duties so important and so far-reaching in their effects?

Another question that arises is, "Why should the law regarding infants be changed for this, and not for the other learned professions? Why should this one class of the community be given the right to make legal contracts, to sue and be sued, etc., three and four years before others, who must reach the age of twenty-one? Class legislation of this kind must be viewed with apprehension, unless founded on the strictest principles of equity, and unless actual suffering or injustice renders such legislation imperative. It is quite certain that the suffering and the injustice in this case are on the side of the State rather than on that of the ever-increasing army of "raw recruits." I believe that so long as this provision of the law remains unaltered, so long as the avenues to the profession remain too easy, just that long will teachers and teaching be looked down upon, and salaries will be, as a rule throughout the country, mere wretched pittance. The fact that a man's income from his profession is from two to five thousand dollars a year, carries with it the respect of the *oi πολλοί*. What can you expect, therefore, when it is from two to five hundred? The over-crowding of the profession by immature teachers must go on and increase annually, (notwithstanding well-meant efforts to stem the tide by rigid examinations and still more rigid examiners), unless the Minister of Education comes to our aid through the Legislature. The teacher then, as well as the doctor and the lawyer, should

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not be permitted by law to enter on the practice of his profession until he has reached the age of twenty-one years. 2. Health.—The teacher should have a sound, vigorous constitution, as a part of his outfit, in order to succeed. In all professions and in every business good health is necessary to the highest success. To the teacher, with his weary round of responsibility and worry, and with a constant drain on his vitality through the necessary expenditure of nervous force, good health, good air, and good food are essential concomitants. The *mens sana* is too often allowed to overbalance the *in corpore sano* and the body suffers at the expense of the intellect. Teachers should be strong, bodily as well as mentally. It is unnatural for children to be impressed by even a giant mind, if encased in a puny, sickly body. Be healthy if you wish to succeed. In this connection the "survival of the fittest" is the inexorable, though sometimes cruel law. 3. Knowledge.—The man or woman who enters the teaching profession should have a much more extended knowledge of men and things than can be shown simply by "passing examinations." (I may remark, in passing, that notwithstanding the spasmodic outcry against examinations, nothing has yet been discovered that can effectively take their place. It must be acknowledged that they have failed in England to do everything that was expected of them, but there the system and not the examination, is at fault. Here we have proved long ago the folly of the "payment by results" system; in England they will discover it in time.) Whether the knowledge of the teacher be limited or extended, it must surely be thorough. Want of thoroughness is one of the weakest points in his armor. His knowledge should be of a special, as well as of a general character. He should have a thorough training in the principles of psychology or mental science. Without a knowledge of the laws which underlie mental growth, how is it possible for him properly to supervise the growth of the child's mind, and skilfully to direct its activities to a healthful fruition? Brain fibre is known to be a delicate structure, and by means of these centres, or through them, mental action takes place. It is also well known that the actions of mind and body are interdependent and that the suffering of one reacts on the other. Hence, a knowledge of the laws governing the mind is of little value without a similar knowledge concerning the body, in other words, a knowledge of Hygiene and Physiology is as essential as a knowledge of Psychology. It must be remembered also that Science should precede art. Methods are mere hap-hazard experiments unless based on the true principles of science. Nevertheless, the newly-fledged teacher is expected to have a knowledge, sufficiently accurate and extensive, of these and other qualifying subjects, as well as to know how to teach a round dozen of others after a fifteen weeks' sojourn at a county Model School, whose Principal may or may not have the special qualifications necessary to those who perform the very difficult work of teaching others "how to teach." How many Model School Principals are even fairly competent to give instruction, as it ought to be given, in the subject of mental science? I am satisfied, that I, for one, am not. The 167 teachers who have passed through my hands during the past six years, had to be treated, in this subject at least, on the homœopathic principle, and many of them objected to the dose even then, unless largely diluted. I couldn't blame them, they were boys and girls—whereas psychology is strong food for grown men. The State is evidently of the same opinion, for it compels our teachers to spend a session at a Model School in learning "how to teach." After three years' practice in the highways and by-ways of our schools, it compels them to take another and longer session at the Normal School, in still further learning "how to teach." Not content with this, it must "pile Pelion on Ossa" by finally compelling its highest grade teachers to take a further session in learning "how to teach" at a training institute, or if you get that high after fifteen or twenty years successful teaching, you must still pass the examination and thus prove that you know "how to teach." 4. Character.—The teacher's character should be above reproach. His "yea" should be "yea" and his "nay," "nay." The higher and nobler his character—the greater is his value as a teacher, as a man, and as a citizen. He should be a cultured gentleman,

not a toady nor a cad. He should be frank, genial and sympathetic, yet firm and self-reliant. In the building up of a successful career no foundation is surer than that of an honest, forceful, Christian character.

Having treated of the teacher and his outfit, I must briefly notice a few of the rungs or rounds of the ladder, which will be of value in assisting him to reach his aim—success. First, I place *study*. The teacher who is not also a student will fail, sooner or later. He must study his pupils and must study himself. He should study the lessons he is to teach, and the best methods of teaching them. By study, his faculties will be strengthened and his judgment developed. For the sake of general culture he must study science, language and literature as well as history and mathematics. I place *reading* next. The teacher needs books, good books, nay, a variety of the best books—to broaden his views and to brighten up his life. In order to become a well-read man he must constantly think as he reads. Skimming over a variety of books results in mere superficiality and discontent. If he have not the means to travel, he can, through books, converse with those who have travelled. Many teachers are "men of one book," well enough read in what pertains to the shop *i.e.* to their own work, but attentive to very little else. On the other hand, many never attend a teachers' convention, nor read an educational journal, or a work on school management, if they can decently help it. The golden mean lies, of course, between the two extremes.

The next important rung is *sociability*. Man, when possessing all his natural powers, is essentially sociable. The teacher must not be a recluse nor live the life of a hermit. He must mingle with the community where his lot is cast, and be, in a good sense, a social power therein. He should show his tact and his power to guide, outside his school-room, as well as in it. He should keep *in touch* with the people and with public sentiment on school matters. I believe this should be the rule all along the line—from the teacher in the log school house to the professor in the university.

The last and most important rung is the teacher's *power to impress*, which includes his "ability to govern." His manner should be pleasant and unmistakably sympathetic. It should be such as will challenge attention and inspire confidence. He must be lively, cheerful, energetic and know "how to question." He must be able, not only to *arouse*, but also to *sustain*, interest in his lesson. Experience should teach him how to so direct his mental energies that they will take root, grow, and develop similar activities in the minds of his pupils. His "ability to govern" depends on "his power to impress," without which he must depend on artificial aids, which usually prove to be "broken reeds." In other words, without the possession, in some degree, of the "power to impress," he can never become a truly successful teacher.

THE SCHOOL TEACHER.

OH, the clamor! Oh, the clatter of the district public school;
Oh, the trials of the teacher! be he man or knave or fool;
With a history class reciting "Washington was born in June,"
And a little prattler asking, "What makes spots come on the moon?"
"Won't you please to point my pencil?" "May I go and get a drink?"
Teacher, with the utmost patience, tries to keep the lesson's link.
History class keeps on reciting, "Bunker Hill is in New York,"
"Won't you make Will stop his pinching?"
"Teacher, I can't find my chalk."
"O, dear me! my pencil's broken," "What does w-a-n-t spell?"
Teacher grabs a cedar ruler, tries his best the noise to quell;
Comes a smack from back of schoolhouse, followed by a stifled moan,
Strikes his bell in desperation, "Scholars, you may all go home."
—The New York Voice.

FALSEHOOD may have its hour, but it has no future.—*Pressense*.