

Special Papers.

THE PROPER FUNCTIONS OF A NORMAL SCHOOL.*

WM. SCOTT, B.A., OTTAWA.

MR. PRESIDENT, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:—When asked to prepare a paper for this Session of the Ontario Teachers' Association, I bethought myself of the position the institutions with which I am immediately connected should occupy in the educational affairs of this Province. I called to mind that in the opinion of some, at least, they are not doing their proper work either as to kind or quality. A gentleman who is well qualified to speak on the subject of Normal Schools addressed you last year, but from a number of causes no discussion followed, and hence little light was shed on this complicated subject. To evoke some discussion, and if possible, to add a few thoughts, the result of a number of years of observation, to the literature of this question, is my excuse for again obtruding upon you the proper functions of a Normal School.

In the outset I make two assumptions without giving the grounds on which I make them. I assume in the first place that there is a science of education, that teaching has passed beyond the limits of mere empiricism, that it is an art, but an art guided by the principles of science, and hence much more is required from the young teacher than that he shall teach like his teacher.

I assume in the second place that those who present themselves at the Normal Schools are, from a literary standpoint, duly prepared and well qualified to enter upon the course of studies that should be pursued therein; and that their previous training has been of such a nature as will enable them to enter at once upon the scientific investigation of the principles of teaching.

1. I would place among the duties of a Normal School the imparting of proper pedagogic principles and their application to school work. As all principles of education have their foundation in human nature, mental, moral and physical, a knowledge of this nature must precede the principles that have their roots in it and are conditioned upon it. Hence, both psychology and physiology have their places in a Normal School curriculum, and it should be the duty of the masters to direct attention as fully as the importance of the subject warrants to the workings of the human mind, to the laws of development and growth of its various faculties, to the various exercises and subjects that are more immediately concerned in the unfolding and developing of these faculties.

If the teacher is to be more than a mere artisan, who does his appointed work from day to day, indifferent alike to the laws of nature which he may be using in his work and to the material on which he works—if the teacher is to be an educative force, to me it is obvious that he can fulfil his mission only when he understands the nature of the frail tenement in which we dwell and the laws which govern its well-being, so that he may duly appreciate the child's physical nature and thus avoid the mistake frequently made of subjecting him to such physical conditions as would utterly preclude the possibility of mental effort; and further, he must make a careful study of the more precious part of man, that with which he is chiefly concerned in school—the mind. Had the teachers of bygone times known anything of the nature of the mind and the laws of its growth, there would have been fewer mistakes in the teaching world than there were. They would have known that we cannot teach *what* we like, but only *what* is in the child's apprehension, nor can we teach *how* we like, but only as *nature* will allow us. They would not have taught so much by rote and rule as they did, nor would they have trusted to a mere memorizing of words, and have called this giving and receiving an education. They would have known that to attempt to beat knowledge into the minds of their pupils is subversive of the first principles of learning, dissipating and distracting their attention from the subject in hand, and violating nature's law that the greater the number of subjects on which attention is attempted to be fixed, the less intense will it be on any one.

Now I regard it as self-evident that no one can

minister to child need, can properly sway and influence him, can manage him so as to restrain and discipline, but not repress his human nature, can provide the necessary exercises to stimulate all the mental activities of the child, can suit his subjects and adapt his mode of teaching to all ages and all stages of mental growth, who has not an adequate comprehension of the activities of a child's mind. Hence, at the very threshold of teaching as a profession—a science, if you will—there must be instruction in the fundamental principles of pedagogic science, and such a knowledge of human nature should be exacted from all intending teachers as would show clearly that each has at least mastered the elements of psychology and physiology. It is clearly the duty of a Normal School to do this work skilfully, and in doing it to illustrate as far as possible the principles therein laid down.

2. A knowledge of the science of education should be followed by its application to the methods of teaching the subjects of the Public School curriculum.

Here the Normal School master should show the rational application and bearing of the principles he has already discussed. He should show how best they can be applied and their ultimate bearing in the training and up-building of the child. It is here that the fundamental difference between the teachers of the old school and of the new shows itself. With the old "knowledge is power" and education is synonymous with the acquisition of knowledge. I confess that this tradition is one of the difficulties the teachers in the Normal Schools have to combat. To one who has succeeded in conning over the pages of a botany so often that he can write out a description of a flower from memory, or who with every minutiae of detail can reproduce the pages of a Roscoe and Shoerleumar, I say to try to make such an one understand that he has not yet begun to study natural science is a task the magnitude of which can not be readily understood by one who has never undertaken it. With these the inculcation of facts is the be-all and end-all of school work.

With the new school of teachers knowledge is not necessarily power. With them the developing and strengthening of the human faculties confer power. Hence with them, the mode of imparting a knowledge of a subject is of vital importance; hence, the store they set upon a due and sufficient exercise of each faculty—hence the importance they attach to teaching the right class of subjects in right ways to each class of pupils, and hence one of their maxims, "learn to know by doing and to do by knowing."

In dealing with methods of teaching another difficulty obtrudes itself, which, I fear, is sometimes lost sight of, viz., that a failure to teach well implies a failure of method. Some seem to think that a method can teach school by itself. Only a man or a woman can teach, while the best methods degenerate into mechanism when the teacher behind it is unable to assimilate and work it into a part of himself.

It is clearly the duty of the Normal Schools to lead in the imparting of improved methods and thus give tone to the general method of teaching throughout the Province; to suggest improvements in the teaching of this or that subject, and at the same time to impress upon its students the idea that no methods, however good now, should be final, that one of the dangers of a teacher's profession is that of getting into the dry rut of routine and mechanism, a danger all the more imminent from the teacher thinking he has a fine method, when the subject will soon grow stale and cease to interest the teacher, and of a consequence will become distasteful and uninteresting to his pupils.

3. As education has engaged human attention from the earliest times, teaching is certainly one of the oldest of the arts, if not of sciences, and as the teacher is to be an educator, as such he should know what has already been done in the great field of human development. He should, as it were, stand on the shoulders of his predecessors, and while avoiding their blunders, make use of their experiments and discoveries. Hence, the intending teacher should know something of the literature of his chosen profession, and hence the vast importance of a history of pedagogics to the young teacher; consequently a history of education should find an important place in the Normal School curriculum.

The man who re-invents the steam engine, or re-discovers Newton's Laws of Motion shows that he has a master-mind, but the human family at large is not benefited. There is no step forward for the human race. So the teacher who re-discovers the principles of Comenius, Pestalozzi, or Froebel, shows he is the peer of these great educators, but the progress of truth and education is not benefited.

Again, the man who starts from first principles and refuses to be guided by those who have preceded him in the physical world, may waste his time and money in re-discovering laws long since known. He alone suffers. Not so in the educational world. The empiric experiments on precious souls. His mistakes may live and grow into misery and crime. Hence, the necessity of this subject, so that our future teachers may be prevented from falling into the pit-holes that have marked human progress, and by following a course that has stood the tests of time and trial, and must consequently be truly scientific and practical, may thus shun the exploded fallacies of by-gone days, and may thus be prepared to conserve the good and ready to reform what is amiss in our educational work.

4. The principles discussed and the methods recommended should be illustrated in as perfect a form as possible in the training school connected with the Normal School. This should be two-fold in its nature. In the first place, lessons should be taught by skilled teachers in the presence of student teachers, who should be required to note the salient points of each lesson; and in the second place, the student should be required to apply and illustrate the principles and methods already discussed by teaching classes under criticism.

The student is thus enabled to note by actual observation the results of the principles taught to him, and the methods based on these principles which have been recommended to him, and thus when he comes to apply them himself they become to him real elements of power.

Then this school should be to the student all that it is implied in the name—a model school—a model as to organization and discipline; a model as to grounds, buildings, apparatus, classification and instruction. Thus this school should be to the intending teacher, each time he visits it, an object lesson on his pedagogic principles.

Again, this school should be used for testing new ideas, and for trying the efficacy of this or that new method, and thus the student will be enabled to observe the results of these experiments. It should also illustrate what can be accomplished by a class in a given kind of work, and thus the student should carry away with him correct ideas of the work to be accomplished both as to kind and quality in the various classes of our public schools.

5. Another duty of a Normal School is to give the students instruction and practice in organizing schools of various kinds, whether graded or ungraded, to apply the principles deduced from the science of education to the management of pupils, and to illustrate as fully as possible the workings of such schools as intending teachers will be required to manage. Hence, at a Normal School the students should observe the actual working and management of such a school as they themselves would subsequently be required to teach, and have as much practice in conducting such a school as the limited time will permit.

I may here remark that while such an extended course of observation and practice must, from the very nature of things, prove of great benefit to the would-be teacher, I believe no school can be so organized and managed as to illustrate all the difficulties that beset the public school teacher, and the best mode of overcoming them. I believe the art of school management, perhaps the most difficult part of a teacher's duty, has to be largely learned by actual work in the school of experience. In the case of the physician no amount of clinical instruction and hospital diagnosis will enable the young physician to deal successfully with all cases, these having to be learned by actual experience, so no school, however managed, will enable the young teacher to grapple successfully with all cases of discipline. But as mistakes are likely to be much fewer in the case of a physician who has enjoyed the benefit of careful instruction and much actual practice under an experienced guide, than when the contrary is the case, so with the teacher

(Continued on page 222.)

*A paper read before the Ontario Teachers' Association at Niagara, August, 1889.