

EDUCATION.

Qualifications for Teaching.

It is often said that two things are requisite for success in teaching—a proper understanding of the subjects to be taught, and aptness to teach. This is very true; but each of these items needs to be particularly examined to get an adequate idea of their scope and meaning.

What is the knowledge, then, let us first inquire, which is essential to good teaching?

One may know a great deal *about* a subject—that is, may know many facts and theories,—and yet, when he is brought to a discussion in simple language of the fundamental principles, he may show that his knowledge is, after all, superficial. On the other hand, one's knowledge may be limited in material, and yet, so far as it goes, it may be thorough. He may have clear ideas of fundamental facts and principles. For example, one may not have received into his mind one-tenth part of what is contained in a full text-book on chemistry, and yet he may have incorporated into his mind vastly more of the science than another who has attempted to learn the whole of this text-book, and has supposed that he has done so because he has memorized it. So, also, one may know all the rules of grammar and the applications of them, and yet may actually know less of the philosophy of language, and may converse less grammatically, than another who knows nothing of the grammarian's rules and technicalities. Indeed, one may be very learned on a subject, and yet he may know little of the principles which lie at its foundation, although, when properly developed and illustrated, they are generally found to be very simple.

It is this fundamental knowledge that tells on the capability of a teacher, in whatever grade of teaching he may be engaged. It is also the introduction of such knowledge into the mind of the pupil that wakes it up into an activity which is never engendered by the learning of mixtures of dry technicalities and isolated facts, so common in the prevalent modes of education. And this activity is attended by a consciousness of power which is really exhilarating to the mind of the pupil, and he is so spurred on that he feels that he is taking long leaps in the pathway of knowledge. Such, I recollect, was the experience of an American sculptor, Bartholomew, on receiving instruction from the great Swedish sculptor Sthorwoldsen. And many have had, to a greater or less extent, a similar experience, on coming under the teaching of those who know how to lay in the mind the foundations of knowledge. It is one of the most vivid of my youthful recollections that, in preparation for college, I learned more of one such teacher in a few weeks than I did in two whole years of another, whose teaching was abundant, but superficial.

Beginning thus with fundamental principles, the teacher can follow out their application. Of course, this must be done to a wider extent in the higher grades of instruction than in the lower; but in both essentially the same knowledge of principles is requisite for good teaching.

In thus working from the foundations the teacher can see the broad scope of a principle or general fact. In natural science it should be his aim, especially with the beginner, to illustrate principles largely from familiar phenomena, so as to cultivate the observing powers. Analogies, also, which are peculiarly attractive to the young, should be traced out. In this way the interest which naturally belongs to a subject will be developed, and we shall have living teaching, in distinction from the dry, dead teaching which spends itself in formal propositions and uninteresting technicalities.

All this implies thinking in the teacher over and beyond what is found in text-books. Something more than a mere apprehension of what is taught in them is requisite. There must be a real incorporation of truth into the mind. The teacher must not only 'read and mark', but also 'inwardly digest', and then he will

induce a corresponding digestion and growth in the minds of his pupils.

In this way the teacher is able to impress his own mind upon the minds of the scholars,—an ability which is one of the best qualifications for teaching. A sort of mental enthusiasm is an essential element of this, and perhaps we may say that the very attainment of such knowledge is proof of the existence of this enthusiasm. And yet some qualities of heart are necessary for the full effect; there must be pleasure in communicating truth to another mind, which implies benevolence.

Aptness to teach, about which so much is said, and often rather indefinitely, is obviously a compound qualification. What I have already noticed is necessary to this. But besides, there is needed a proper understanding of the aptitude and the capabilities of the minds of pupils. And just here there is very commonly failure in teachers. They are continually presuming that what is taught is fully understood, when proper tests would reveal the fact that much of it is not understood at all, and that some of it is most grossly misapprehended. Especially is this true of the youngest pupils. Indeed, the higher the grade of pupils, the less effort of mind does it require to adapt the instruction to them. In visiting a school in one of our cities where there was a large range of grades—in the upper rooms the instruction belonging to a high school being pursued, and in the lower the very beginnings of primary teaching,—I was struck with the fact that the efficiency and appropriateness of the instruction, which were excellent in the upper rooms, were quite regularly impaired as I went down in the grades, and in the very lowest room the instruction was entirely inappropriate. In this room were gathered about fifty children, who were reciting about certain words written on a blackboard, such as *bad*, *pen*, *men*. They all spelled the word together, and then offered what purported to be a definition. After spelling the word *pen*, the teacher asked: What is *pen*? To this a bright little girl replied at once: *A thing to write with*, which I thought to be a good definition; but it did not suit the teacher, and they were all made to say a *writing-instrument*,—an answer that better comported with the formality and technicality which so generally prevail in the school-room. So the definition for men was *human beings*. In a little question-talk which I had with this school, I said to them: "You say that men are human beings: now I want to know if you are human beings?" The whole fifty said *No*, with such fullness of voice as indicated that they were certain that they were right.

The power of adaptation is needed not only in regard to different grades of mind, but also in reference to individual peculiarities. Many a mind of real ability has had its powers repressed from failure in the teacher to detect its characteristic qualities. It is difficult, I know, in the established routine of our public schools, to become acquainted with the mental character of the several pupils in large classes, in the short periods allotted for recitations; but it is not impossible with one who is alive to the importance of this knowledge in educating mental power, which should be the great object of education. And to accomplish this, occasional setting-aside of this routine would not be amiss.

It results from what I have said that one quite essential qualification of the teacher is a due sense of the importance of making the pupil understand what he learns. A very serious disqualification in many teachers, of real talent in teaching, is the notion that it is well to store the memory with much that can not be understood at present, because, retained in the memory, it will be understood at a future time. *Most* (observe that I do not say all) *that is committed to memory should be understood at the time*; and the teacher who holds the opposite idea mars decidedly his ability to teach.

Another essential qualification of the teacher is a sense of his liability to presume too much on the capabilities of his pupils. Such a sense will lead him to apply every now and then proper tests to their supposed knowledge.

Another qualification still is a sense of his liability to underestimate the capacities of his pupils, especially in relation to their