

THE HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER OF MATHEMATICS.

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THERE is an important sense in which the preparation of every teacher is beyond the reach of human influences. His preparation has begun before his birth. He is either endowed by nature with personal qualities that should forever exclude him from the ranks of the teaching profession, or he possesses such qualities, as under appropriate training, enable him to overcome the inevitable difficulties that will beset his path, and ultimately to attain varying degrees of usefulness from mediocrity to the highest skill in his art. If he is a physical or mental weakling, if he is stolid and heavy, if he is indifferent to nature, human nature and art, if he lacks enthusiasm in the pursuit of his subject and never feels the glow of conscious mastery, if he has a crabbed or irritable disposition, if he is brilliant but unsympathetic, if he lacks an interest in his pupil at least equal to his interest in his subject, if he has no tact, and is lacking in the sense of humor that often furnishes the silver lining to an otherwise black cloud of youthful idleness or seeming perversity—in a word, if he is not physically and mentally vigorous, alert and active, if he is not interestedly and healthily responsive to the varied interests of life, if he cannot cherish a feeling of good will and maintain a hopeful and encouraging attitude in spite of many discouragements and some failures, whatever he may be able to achieve in other callings, he ought never to be a teacher. I need hardly say that, in what follows, adequate natural capacity and a responsive nature are assumed, and that my discussion pertains only to the preparation of the would-be teacher who possesses these characteristics.

The preparation needed by every high-school teacher is both general and special; that is to say, it should cover the essential elements of a liberal education, and special training in that subject or group of closely related subjects which the teacher expects to teach; together with enough professional training to show him his responsibilities to his pupils as well as to his specialty, and help him to become as good a teacher as possible as soon as possible. That a high-school teacher should in general, have profited by an education at least equivalent to that afforded by a good American college, ought to be universally recognized. Since this is not the case, one must assume either indifference to or ignorance of the importance of a liberal culture for high school teachers on the part of those who employ the teachers, or are responsible for their employment. Under such circumstances, it becomes one's duty to do what he can toward influencing public opinion on this very important matter. I am aware that in this presence this endeavor is unnecessary, if not somewhat presumptuous; but I am sure that the deliberations of this club are intended not merely for the enlightenment of its members, but also to promote the dissemination of wholesome educational ideals in the larger community outside, which the members of this club serve as educational advisers and teachers, and the intelligent co-operation of which they aim to secure in every legitimate way. It seems worth while, therefore, to point out briefly the serious consequences of indifference or ignorance on the part of employers of high-school teachers as regards the general culture essential to real efficiency.