

EDUCATIONAL METAPHORS.*

GEORGE ELIOT tells us in "The Mill on the Floss" that Tom Tulliver's brain, being peculiarly impervious to etymology and mathematical demonstrations, his tutor, Mr. Stelling, came to the conclusion that it was peculiarly in need of being ploughed and harrowed by these patent implements. "It was his favourite metaphor," she says, "that the classics and geometry constituted that culture of the mind which prepared it for the reception of any subsequent crop. I say nothing," she continues, "against Mr. Stelling's theory; if we are to have one regimen for all minds, his seems as good to me as any other. I only know it turned out uncomfortably for Tom Tulliver, as if he had been plied with cheese in order to remedy a gastric weakness which prevented him from digesting it. It is astonishing what a different result one gets by changing the metaphor. Once call the brain an intellectual stomach, and one's ingenious conception of the classics and geometry as ploughs and harrows seems to settle nothing. But then it is open to some one else to follow great authorities, and call the mind a sheet of white paper or a mirror, in which case one's knowledge of the digestive process becomes irrelevant. It was doubtless an ingenious idea to call the camel the ship of the desert, but it would hardly lead one far in training that useful beast. O Aristotle! if you had the advantage of being 'the freshest modern' instead of the greatest ancient, would you not have mingled your praise of metaphorical speech, as a sign of high intelligence, with a lamentation that intelligence

so rarely shows itself in speech without metaphor—that we can so seldom declare what a thing is, except by saying it is something else?"

To this question I would venture to reply that Aristotle was much too sensible a man to lament the inevitable. As we do not know what mind is in itself, we cannot define it in terms of mind, nor can we describe its processes, or any changes wrought in it, except in terms drawn from the material world. In other words, we are compelled from the nature of the case to use language more or less metaphorical. Nor is this necessity so deplorable as George Eliot seemed to think. A metaphor may not enable us to state the whole of the truth, but it may bring home to our minds in a very forcible way some important aspect of the truth. To take her own case, the designation of the camel as the ship of the desert, though it may not throw much light on the training of the camel, vividly sets before us the unique services which the camel renders to mankind. We may even reason from analogies provided we restrict our inferences to real points of agreement.

I have been led into my introductory quotation, and the remarks based upon it, by reflecting on the wide variety of educational metaphors, the arguments valid and invalid which are often based upon them, and the curious reflex influence they have had on educational practice.

The whole vocabulary of education is made up of metaphors, for the simple reason that education has mainly to do with mind, and mind, as we have seen, can be spoken of in no other way. Some of these metaphors are so faded that we often overlook their original significance. To *teach* meant, primarily, to point out;

* A paper read by the Rev. Canon Daniel, M.A., at the monthly evening meeting of the College of Preceptors, London.